

Salvation

What is it and How do you get it

by David L. Miner

I want to take a few minutes to explain what the Bible, and those who follow the Bible, mean when they talk about being saved. There is a HUGE amount of misinformation available on this issue, mostly from those who DON'T believe in the Bible, but also from some who DO believe in the Bible. So I want to address what the Bible actually teaches for those who might be interested in knowing the truth. And yes, I know this is a huge and ambitious task, and maybe even a pompous task. Well, those who know me already know I don't shy away from huge and even pompous tasks when it comes to talking about the Bible and its claims. So grab yourself a tall cool one, or a short and hot one, and read on, if you dare.

The first thing to remember is that there are two parts or experiences to this salvation thing. It is important to remember this because Scripture is full of references and promises to people, and not all of those passages are made to all people. And NO we are not all God's people!

The first part is what most people call salvation, or getting saved. It is a process whereby the individual recognizes that he or she is a sinner in need of God. And this is really quite simple. The second part is also called salvation, but it is being saved, an ongoing process of making believers look and act and BE more like Jesus.

But first let me clear up two errors that have been propagated, perhaps even invented, by the Christian Church.

First, you don't **go to hell** because of things you do. No one goes to hell because he or she commits sins, or does bad things, or makes mistakes. No one goes to hell for stealing or lying or committing adultery. You can go to hell for one reason and ONLY one reason – you have chosen to not believe in the God of the Bible and the claims of Jesus Christ.

But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each others' bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise!

Amen. That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved. Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too. [Romans 1:18-32, New Living Translation]

You don't go to hell because of things you do. The things you do are only manifestations of the fact that you are already going to hell.

Second, you don't **go to heaven** because of the things you do. Anyone and everyone can go to heaven, regardless of their religious background and beliefs. Scripture tells us that people can go to heaven if they choose to go to heaven. The only requirement is to believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – believe that in his life, death, and resurrection there is a power and a plan to erase sin and render you acceptable to God for an eternity. And the Bible indicates that “believe” is more than a simple intellectual collection of facts; it is instead a process of accepting by faith that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the one and only Son of God is the only sacrifice for your sins that is acceptable to God, and relying on that sacrifice as your only means of being invited to heaven by God. This “belief” results in God showing his love and grace, and adopting you into the Family of God.

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the [Old Testament] law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. [Romans 3:21-26, New Living Translation]

If you are adopted into God's family, you go with him to heaven for an eternity. If you aren't adopted into God's family, you get left behind. It is as simple as that.

So let's see what this *Getting Saved*, and then *Being Saved*, is all about.

Getting Saved:

Back in the book of Genesis, we read that God created a perfect world with two perfect and sinless people. He placed those two perfect and sinless people in a beautiful Garden. He gave them everything they needed: food to eat, a limited wardrobe, HBO, and one rule – they could eat anything and everything they found except for the fruit of ONE TREE.

And, of course, they ate the fruit of that ONE TREE.

So God said, “You obviously don't love me and you obviously don't want to follow me, so I am going to kick you out of my place and let you make it on your own. You wanted it, you got it.” [obviously paraphrased]

So from that time forward, people had to make their way in this world on their own and without God's help. Over the next few thousand years, people really struggled to make it on their own. But most people, deep down inside where fears and hopes reside, *KNEW* that they needed God. There was just something missing since they were kicked out of God's presence. Many have noted that most people feel a sense of peace and well-being when they listen to the sound of waves on the shore, or when they view the majesty of mountains. There is even a segment of the music industry dedicated to providing albums and CDs with the sounds that can make us feel that way. Psychologists have for years recommended these sound effects to help people relax. And why do these sounds and scenes help us to relax? Most Christians and many others believe they take us back to a time when we were relaxing in that Garden before God kicked us out; a time when mankind was at peace with God and each other. And the Apostle Paul, in writing the Book of Romans, clearly stated it in the passage we read above: *“For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature.”*

Some people call this a “racial memory” and others call it “genetic memory.” But all groups and tribes and civilizations over history have felt it and manifested it. Whichever, it is clearly universal. That is why in some way, every tribe and race and civilization has had a god, and many have had more than one god. There is something inside of us that “calls” us to a god, to something bigger than us. Of course, those who follow the Bible claim this is evidence of God reaching out to and calling mankind back to him. We believe it is obvious that God uses his creation to call ALL mankind back to a right and righteous relationship with him.

Blaise Pascal probably said it best more than a hundred years ago when he wrote: *“Inside every man is a God-shaped vacuum that can never be filled by any created thing, but only by the Creator himself.”*

But you must first recognize that you “fall short” of what God planned and wanted for you – wanted for all mankind. This “falling short” was an archery term for missing the bull's eye, and the Greek word is translated into the English word “sin” in the Bible. To “fall short” means you are a sinner, one who has fallen short of what God planned and wanted for you. Because of what happened with Adam and Eve, we have since then ALL fallen short of what God wanted,

and we must repent of that disobedience and failure and ask God for forgiveness. This is what the Bible means when it says we must be saved.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. [Romans 3:23, New Living Translation]

Jesus explained it this way to one of the well-known teachers during his time:

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

"How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up [on a cross], so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants." [John 3:1-21, New Living Translation]

This is what The Bible and believers in the Bible mean when they say you must "get saved." To get saved, we must leave behind a life lived on our own efforts and according to our own beliefs and philosophies, and turn to follow Jesus and what he says in the Bible.

Being Saved:

“*Being saved*” is the process of manifesting more and more the life of Jesus, the life we were predestined way back in the Garden of Eden to live when we were originally perfect and sinless people and followers of God. The Apostle Paul made a short statement about it in his letter to the believers in Philippi, when he said:

Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.
[Philippians 2:12, New Living Translation]

Or, to say it another way:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. [Philippians 2:12, New King James Version]

This short statement is often used to support the belief that you must do what you want, live like you want, be what YOU believe a good Christian should be, and that is all God asks. But that is not at all what Paul meant when he said this. Paul described more clearly what he meant a few paragraphs earlier in this same letter to the Philippians, when he said:

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus. I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God. [Philippians 1:6-11, New Living Translation]

The truth is simple – the process of *being saved* is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus. But we must avoid any misunderstanding. Believers in Christ, those who are *being saved*, will sometimes fall short themselves. Part of it is the fact that they have lived their entire lives until that point as people who are just as fallen and sinful as anyone else on the planet. And part of it is the fact that they have not yet developed into what God has planned for them. All sorts of people have claimed quite loudly that Christians are hypocrites; that they are people who don't live up to their claims of following Christ. These people merely demonstrate their ignorance - they do not know what it means to be a Christian. The Apostle John in his first letter to Believers explains part of this problem when he states:

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. [1 John 1:8-10, New Living Translation]

Christians are not perfect; we are merely forgiven.

And we are challenged to go on living for God in all of our efforts, because that is what God wants from us. So we grow in God's grace and we manifest the character and nature of Christ's life more and more as we grow. And we hopefully show enough of that life that others will see Jesus and not our weaknesses and failures. At least that is Paul's prayer for us:

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. [Ephesians 2:1-10, New Living Translation]

There are only two ways to get to heaven: you must be perfect or you must be forgiven. And the last person who was perfect was crucified on a cross more than two thousand years ago. That leaves you and me out.

But I am so glad I am forgiven!