

# Salvation: What It Is

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We have all heard about salvation and how each one of us needs to have it in order to get to Heaven. But what exactly is salvation? And most importantly, how do we get it?

To start a conversation about salvation, I believe first we need to know exactly what sin is. After all, salvation is to save us from our sins and if we don't know what sin is, then we can't begin to understand the wonderful concept of salvation.

According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, sin literally means "a missing of the mark." The word is derived from the Greek word *hamartia* (ham-ar-tee'-ah) which is similar to *hamartano* (ham-ar-tan'-o) meaning: 1) to be without a share in, 2) to miss the mark, 3) to err or be mistaken, 4) to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honor, to do or go wrong and 5) to wander from the law of God, violate God's law.<sup>1</sup>

We can easily see from this examination that anything we do that is contrary to God's will or law would be considered a sin. There is a goal, or a mark, for all of us to reach. If we deny God's will, we are missing that mark. We are not sharing in the righteousness of God or walking in the path of uprightness and honor.

A very long time ago, God told two people not to eat a certain fruit. However they did eat it, and by doing so, they sinned.<sup>2</sup> They went contrary to God's will. They violated God's law, and because of this violation, sin entered the world for us all. "*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned...*" Romans 5:12.

The Bible tells us that every one of us has sinned and now falls short of the glory of God.<sup>3</sup> It also tells us that, because of sin, all men are condemned to die: that the wages, or payment, of sin is death.<sup>4</sup> But there is a way for us to escape this persecution, and that is through salvation. After all, "*how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?*"<sup>5</sup>

The word salvation comes from the Greek word *soteria* (so-tay-ree'-ah), and is a "deliverance from the molestation of enemies."<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew word *yeshuw'ah* (yesh-oo'-ah) means "victory."<sup>7</sup> So salvation then is a victory over sin. It delivers us from the molestation of sin.

We need salvation. Without it, all of us are doomed. No "ifs", "ands" or "buts" about it. But how do we gain salvation? Is there anything that we can do?

In 2005, The Barna Research Group did a poll of born again Christians.<sup>8</sup> They discovered that about one-third of born again Christians (33%) believe that if a person is good enough they can earn a place in Heaven.<sup>9</sup> That same year, they discovered that 54% of all adults,

including non-born again Christians, believe that if a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in Heaven.<sup>10</sup>

Sounds good. All we have to do is lead good lives and be good to one another, and *viola*, we're there. But is this what the Word of God teaches? Or is this what man teaches?

In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul writes, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*" What does this mean? It simply means that, no matter what good works we do here in life, we can only be saved by God's grace. It is God who saves us. It is God who redeems us. It is God who provides the means of salvation.

Once there was a man whose wife had gone away for a few weeks. While she was gone, this man got the urge to go out with another woman, and an adulterous affair began. After a few days, this man began feeling guilty about the affair and called it off. Knowing that the wife would be home soon, he went about cleaning the house, making it immaculate. On the day of his wife's return, he filled the living room with flowers and prepared a gourmet meal. Needless to say, the wife was thrilled. All this work her husband was doing really made her feel loved. After a few days, she decided to do some laundry. It was then that she noticed lipstick stains on her husband's shirt collar. It wasn't her color! He had cheated on her!

The husband tried to redeem himself with good works, but no matter what he did, the stain of his adulterous affair was still there. That is exactly how it is with us and God. No matter what we do, no matter how nice we are, no matter how many charities we donate to, no matter how much money we give to the church, the stain of sin is still upon us. We cannot wash it out.

In the Old Testament days, blood played a significant part in the forgiveness of sins. An individual would bring animals, such as lambs and doves, to the temple. This individual would then be handed a knife. He would then place his hands on the animal's head and confess his sins. This symbolized the transfer of sin from the individual to the animal. At this point, the individual was considered innocent of sin while the animal was considered guilty, therefore the animal had to die. In other words, it had to pay the price for sin. The individual would then be required to sacrifice that animal himself.<sup>11</sup> By doing so, he would be able to graphically see what sin does – causes death. In Hebrew 9:22 we read, "*And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*" These animal sacrifices provided salvation to the people of the Old Testament, however someone would come to provide the ultimate sacrifice. And this ultimate sacrifice would do away with all other sacrifices.

God is very patient with us. His patience is so great that we can't even fathom it. And His love for us is even greater. God doesn't want anyone of us to perish, but for everyone to repent of his sins.<sup>12</sup> Because of this great love for us, God sent His only son, Jesus, into this world, so that we could have a chance at salvation.<sup>13</sup> Jesus tells us "*God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*"<sup>14</sup>

When man sinned, a gap formed between man and God, separating them for all time. Jesus is the bridge that spans that gap, giving man the ability to reach God through Him. It is only through Jesus that we even have a chance at salvation. Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice. It is Jesus who has come into this world to shed His blood for our sins. It is the blood of Christ that will wash away the stain of sin. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*"<sup>15</sup> Christ died for us, so that we may have life. Jesus himself said, "*For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*"<sup>16</sup>

Jesus provides the salvation that we need, and the best news is that that salvation is free for the taking. It cannot be bought. As we said earlier, nothing you can do will earn you salvation. It is a gift of God. But like any gift, it can be accepted or denied.

It is true that God knows who will and will not accept this gift. Since the foundation of the world, He has known.<sup>17</sup> However the gift of salvation is still offered to everyone. A man was once throwing a dinner party. He knew that some of his friends would not be able to come for one reason or another, but he sent them an invitation nonetheless. Why? Because he didn't want it to be said that he was unfair or unjust as to whom he invited. Although he knew who would or would not make the dinner party, he left it up to people themselves to either accept or to deny the invitation.

An unknown author once said, "*Sin is like quicksand. Your own efforts only make you sink deeper. Only an outside hand can pull you out.*" But you must decide to take that hand. Believe in Jesus. Believe that He is the Christ; the Messiah. Believe with all your heart and soul. Believe with everything you have, and your sins will be forgiven. Jesus Himself said that "*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live...*"<sup>18</sup> He went on to say that "*...whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*"<sup>19</sup>

We all need salvation. There's no doubt about that. The question is whether we will accept that salvation. It's out there. All you need to do is "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*"<sup>20</sup> Accept the gift and accept life. Forsake the gift, and forsake life. The choice is yours. Make it wisely.

Your life depends on it.

## End Notes

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Please note: All Bible quotes come from the King James Version of the Holy Bible

<sup>1</sup> Blue Letter Bible [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:6

<sup>3</sup> Romans 5:23

<sup>4</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 2:3

<sup>6</sup> Blue Letter Bible [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> For the study, born again Christians were defined based on the answers to two questions. The first is “have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?” If the respondent says “yes,” then they are asked a follow-up question about life after death. One of the seven perspectives a respondent may choose is “when I die, I will go to Heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.” Individuals who answer “yes” to the first question and select this statement as their belief about their own salvation are then categorized as “born again.” The Barna Group [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)

<sup>9</sup> The Barna Group [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Leviticus 1:4, 11

<sup>12</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>13</sup> John 3:16

<sup>14</sup> John 3:17

<sup>15</sup> Romans 5:6

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 26:28

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 1:4

<sup>18</sup> John 11:25

<sup>19</sup> John 11:26

<sup>20</sup> Luke 11:9