

# Salvation

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# Salvation: God's Gift to Man

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Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth century French mathematician, once stated, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ." The phrase is remembered even today not because of its eloquence, but because of its universally understood truth. People consume themselves in a search for satisfaction, belonging and purpose. It seems that life is born with an unquenchable thirst to correct some congenital problem. Men strive their entire working lives to afford a dream that is never realized. We save, plan and build our dreams only to realize they could have been bigger or somehow better. We work ourselves to the top of the company ladder only to yearn to have gone further. Our culture entices us with goods, services and promises of satisfaction that are never delivered. It seems that Pascal was onto something: man has a fundamental flaw that sentences him to insufficiency and discord.

Promises for the resolution to man's biggest problem abound everywhere we turn. Television psychiatrists and well-read talk show hosts promise daily to provide answers for man's need. Book authors continually write the next versions of last year's promised answer to the issue. We live in the most advanced and prosperous times the world has ever known but continue with a full understanding that something in the heart of man is just not right. All of the proposed answers that man provides for his lack of sufficiency simply reveal that they are insufficient as well. Man's problem cannot be solved from within, for the true nature of man's problem is much bigger than most realize. Our problem is not with ourselves, it is with our creator.

According to the Bible, man's problem stems not from his lack of direction or ambition. It is not the result of poor planning or sloppy execution. It is rather the result of sin: man's willing and conscious rebellion from God. The Bible explains,

***Psalm 14:2-3 (ESV)***

<sup>2</sup> *The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.*

<sup>3</sup> *They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.*

Salvation from his condemnation before God is man's most needed remedy and is the chief revelation of the whole of the Bible. The call to and nature of salvation is the prevailing message of scripture at every turn. The need for salvation applies to every man in every age. None are exempt, and none are left without the provision for it, though not all - indeed precious few - will partake of it. In Genesis, man's sin created the need for salvation to exist. In Revelation the full fruition of salvation is realized with the creation of a new earth and the installment of Heavenly perfection upon it.

The current age is filled with all manners of spurious teachings which presume to attest to the nature of the salvation of man. Misinformation to the Bible's teaching on the subject is rampant,

with men presenting the doctrine of "salvation" as if it were a product to be secured at some human cost. This book is concerned solely with what the Bible has to say about man's problem with God, and God's solution to man.

## Man's Problem: Sin

The scriptures proclaim from the very beginning that what God created was good, right and unblemished by sin.<sup>1</sup> At that time, God revealed to man but one law:

### **Genesis 2:16-17 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,

<sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

In the establishment of his superiority in all things, the Lord granted that one simple law. And, for the breaking of this law God prescribed a very simple, but costly penalty. If they ate the forbidden fruit, they would die.

Adam and Eve had every good food at their disposal. They had no legitimate reason to stray from God's ordained command. But they were tempted by the original sinner, Satan, and disobeyed God's command.

### **Genesis 3:1-6 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

<sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,

<sup>3</sup> but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.

<sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Thus, sin entered the world. "Sin" is best defined as disobedience to God. God has a standard that he has revealed to mankind from the beginning. That standard was perfection, which man has always failed to achieve. Sin began with Adam and Eve's failure to obey God's simple command in the Garden of Eden, but it continues in all manners of disobedience to God on the earth today.

Many find the idea of being called "sinful" very offensive. In fact, one of the most difficult things to communicate to today's culture is that the *need* for such a thing as "salvation" exists. While the Bible teaches that man is sinful, or disobedient to God, it seems a world view of self adulation has engulfed many in our culture, where ideas of right and wrong are frequently re-cast

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:31

as “personal life choices” rather than offenses to a divine creator. To that end, "sin" is in many cases categorically denied as a reality in favor of the idea that right and wrong are relative to one's own personal experiences.

The Bible tells a decisively different story. In scripture, the conflict introduced to the narrative is that of willful disobedience to God, and the remedy is something entirely beyond man's control or ability to produce. "Salvation," by its very definition, demands that there is something which is inherently destructive which is to be remedied. For one to be "saved," one must indeed be in a condition which requires him *to be* saved. To be saved from a burning building demands that there be an actual fire. To be saved from drowning demands that water must be imminently threatening the subject's life. Scripture undeniably and decisively identifies the essence of one's need for salvation to be wholly tied to one's sinful condition.

Salvation is the remedy *for sin*. It is not the means to self-satisfaction, heightened awareness or a harmonious existence in creation. While elements from those feel-good ideologies *may* accompany a redeemed life, it is salvation from the penalty of sin which is the heart and soul of the issue of man which the Bible offers remedy.

## God's Nature: Holy

An overwhelming descriptive characteristic of God presented in scripture is summed up in the term "holy." It is perhaps this term by which all of God's attributes can be globally portrayed in a singular package. He is unique and set apart from anything and everything else which exists or can be imagined. In Isaiah's vision of heaven, he saw the Lord God on his throne exhibiting such glory that those present were incapable of anything other than his exaltation.

### ***Isaiah 6:3 (NIV)***

*<sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

"Holiness" denotes a state of being completely set apart, or consecrated. God, being holy, is unique among all that has ever existed, being the pinnacle of glory; he is that which is unique among all else. It is He alone who occupies the utmost position of power, honor and glory. John, likewise, experienced this awe in his vision of Heaven; where God's manifest presence was exposed and witnessed in its pure state.

### ***Revelation 15:1-4 (NIV)***

*<sup>1</sup> I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues-- last, because with them God's wrath is completed. <sup>2</sup> And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God <sup>3</sup> and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. <sup>4</sup> Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

It is this incontaminable nature of God which is exemplified in the designation of "holy." These immutable qualities of God were the character out of which the creation was formed and the heights from which it has fallen to its current state. It is these various attributes of God which have demanded the separation between himself and man.

One attribute of God's holiness is that he is perfect in every way. The Bible says,

***Deuteronomy 32:4 (NIV)***

*<sup>4</sup> He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.*

***Psalms 18:30 (NIV)***

*<sup>30</sup> As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.*

As a perfect being, he cannot sin. Sin is in fact defined by God's nature, for sin is anything that is contrary to God's perfect nature.

Necessarily, that which is perfect cannot absorb the slightest infraction of that which is imperfect. A perfectly clean surgical utensil is utterly defiled by the slightest touch of an unsterilized hand. A perfectly purified glass of water is no longer so designated if it should be joined with the slightest drop of grime. And, a perfect God is unavoidably separate from that which is anything less than pristine. Such is the nature of man after sin entered the world. It is sin which God utterly refuses to fellowship with. It is sin which invaded God's perfect creation, rendering himself estranged from man by his own judicious principles.

In the beginning, however, all of creation- being the substance of a perfect creator- shared his pristine glory.

***Genesis 1:29-31 (NIV)***

*<sup>29</sup> Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day.*

Creation was indeed ordained in perfection, after God's own nature. After each manifestation of God's creative will he noted, "it is good." After the creation of man he noted, "it is very good." Yet, that which was good was marred in the testing of man's own will.

God granted Adam freedom in his estate. He was in no way hindered from his environment, save for one tree which he was not to eat from.

***Genesis 2:8-17 (NIV)***

*<sup>8</sup> Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. <sup>9</sup> And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. <sup>10</sup> A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. <sup>11</sup> The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup> (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) <sup>13</sup> The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. <sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*

Given the choice to enjoy all of God's perfection to the fullest, man was yet given an opportunity to choose loyalty to his Creator or to pursue his own path.

*"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*

Even after a proper warning, man failed that test and pursued his independence from God. Adam and Eve chose to sin and rebel from God's perfect nature. Man became sinful. God's perfect creation was tainted by a singular dose of that which defiles. Man was uncompromisingly perverted by sin and incapable of his former existence in God's presence and fellowship. God simply cannot tolerate sin.

Such is the basis for salvation. Sin has corrupted man, and man will eternally be separated from God because of it without God's provision for salvation. Salvation, then, is the means by which sin can be eradicated and man can be restored to the fellowship of his creator. Salvation is *not*, as some preach today, the means by which man can find a better job, a fruitful outlook on life, health, wealth and personal increase. While these things *may* be given to a believer (or may not!), salvation is the application of God's grace whereby *any* such blessings from God are even a possibility to those who otherwise are objects of God's wrath because of sin. It is sin which is the abomination to be remedied. It is the wages of sin which *must be paid* for man to have any hope for such an abundant life.

## The Universality of Sin

The Bible explains that through Adam's breaking of God's law every person that followed from his line would be born into sin.

### **Romans 5:12 (ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—*

From the advent of Adam and Eve's trespass, sin has incumbently existed in mankind. As a result, all who have followed are unconditionally marred with it, and separated from God just as Adam and Eve were. Only Christ alone, having been born outside of the seed of man, was born without the preexisting condition of sinfulness. To all others, sin is a universal birth defect. The Bible states,

### **Psalms 14:1-3 (NIV)**

*<sup>1</sup> The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. <sup>2</sup> The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. <sup>3</sup> All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*

Sin is congenital, being at man's core from his very birth. Never does a father sit his toddler down and instruct him on how to lie. Never does a mother instruct her two year old on how to properly throw a walled tantrum. Such instruction is unnecessary and counterproductive, for sin has been well at work in their child's life; yielding such sinful actions as instinctive, involuntary and compulsory. Contrarily, parents must *teach* their children righteous behavior! They must *teach* their children to share, *train* their children to play nicely with others and *instruct* their children concerning honesty. The sin nature is not a learned response. It is quite

the default state, for sin is truly universal, having affected the whole of humanity and requiring the remedy of salvation that one may be restored to his holy creator.

Even as adults the nature to sin is ever present. When we disagree with others we must force restraint on ourselves so that we do not say or do something “natural.” Our nature might be to punch someone in the nose, but we know that is wrong, so we compel ourselves to restraint. Even when we succeed in such self-restraint, however, the very fact that our compulsion was to sin is evidence that sin is alive and well within us. Even when we get something right, evil is with us. Our hearts are corrupt.

God’s law reveals that his ways are very much unlike our own. Even among the infamous ten commandments (which were ten of over six hundred revealed in the Old Testament) we are utterly incapable of upholding God’s standard.

The Ninth Commandment notes, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”<sup>2</sup> In simple terms, this commandment notes that we are not to lie about anyone else. Yet, there are none among us who have not lied against another person. The Tenth Commandment states, “You shall not covet.”<sup>3</sup> But covetousness seems to be an American pastime, for we all find ourselves desiring the property or influence of our neighbors. Likewise, the Eighth Commandment prohibits us from stealing, but most have stolen *something* in their lifetimes.

Jesus took the understanding of the commandments to a whole new level. He demonstrated that the true sinful condition of man is a heart condition, even if man manages to keep his deeds proper. Jesus noted, concerning the Seventh Commandment,

**Matthew 5:27-28 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Thus, even among those who have kept their marriage vows intact physically, Jesus says we are adulterers if we have even *thought lustful thoughts!*

Most of us, according to God’s standard, are lying, thieving, covetous adulterers. While we may be tempted to think, “I’m better than most people,” we will not be judged in comparison to most people, but to God. God’s standard of perfection has been utterly destroyed by us all. We are sinful. And admission to such sin is the starting place for our Salvation, for no one can be saved of their sinful condition until they are willing to confess it.<sup>4</sup>

## The Penalty of Sin

The problem of man’s sinful condition, however, is that scripture *undeniably* states that God *will* punish us for it. It is in fact not possible for God to be truly righteous if he does not punish sin. To *not* punish sin would credit God with *unrighteousness* by allowing justice to not be served for wrongdoing.

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 20:16

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20:17

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 1:9

When a judge in a human court of law exercises a verdict against an offender, he can only be understood to be a righteous judge if he condemns the unrighteous action of the offender. To render no punishment to one who deserves it is utterly inconsistent with truly righteous judgment. If someone were to injure or kill one of our family members and a judge allowed him to go free because he was the judge's friend, we would by no wise consider him a righteous judge. Rather, we would tell the world of the corrupt status of the judge; for he is not concerned with upholding the law.

God is a just judge. His law is a binding law. Sin simply must be punished for any righteousness to exist in God's character. God prescribed such punishment clearly.

The immediately visible punishment of sin is that of physical death. God noted to Adam,

***Genesis 2:17 (ESV)***

*<sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

While God did not elaborate on the full nature of death, it is clear in scripture that physical decay is one facet of the death God prescribed. Developing the understanding of a physical and mechanical aspect of death, Paul notes more clearly,

***1 Corinthians 15:21-22 (NIV)***

*<sup>21</sup> For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

Speaking in the context of a bodily resurrection, Paul notes that physical death came through the foundational sin of Adam. Likewise, Paul notes the restorative work of salvation as he describes the future resurrections of the bodies of men. All will die physically because of their sin, but those who find their salvation in Christ will also be resurrected to a future new life. It is important that we understand that physical death is not a penalty which will be thwarted outside of the future resurrection of the righteous. While all who are saved *will be* redeemed from the physical death which sin wrought, physical death remains a reality of God's promise; "the day you eat of it you will surely die."

There is additionally a *spiritual* death which is a guaranteed estate for humanity. Such is the pinnacle of hope in God's provision of salvation; to be rescued from the eternal consequences of one's sin. Paul notes in Ephesians,

***Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV)***

*<sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.*

This being "made alive" is the point of salvation. Life is the contrast to the spiritual estate of those who are lost,

***Romans 3:23 (NIV)***

*<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....*

Sin's penalty is also spiritual, however. By default, no one will eternal life and salvation. Because we were born into sin we were also born into the full judgment of sin which is physical and spiritual death. Jesus said,

**Matthew 13:40-42 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> *Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age.*

<sup>41</sup> *The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,*

<sup>42</sup> *and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

“All law-breakers” refers to every one of us in our inherited sinful state. We all break God’s laws daily and are sentenced by default for an eternal destruction in a lake of fire. No passage of scripture depicts this more clearly than Revelation 21.

**Revelation 21:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”*

Specifically noting “the second death,” it is crystal clear that God’s judgment for sin is eternal, not merely temporal. Likewise, chapter 20 of that book notes,

**Revelation 20:14-15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> *Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*

<sup>15</sup> *And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Anyone whose name was not found in the “book of life” is to be cast into the eternal place of torment. The penalty for sin for us today is precisely what it has always been. Death is in store for each of us physically and spiritually. Rest assured, however, that there is hope for redemption in Christ. One is not relegated to this torment if one receives by faith the true Gospel (Good News) of Christ that is revealed in the Bible. But death is the congenital status of every sinner according to God’s law.

As such, spiritual and physical death are the promised fruition of one's sin, and are the essence of what one is in need of being saved from.

Scriptures, then, answer clearly the question, "saved from what?" Salvation is concerned with the remedying of that which resulted from the advent of sin into man and creation. It is sin which one is to be saved "from." It is the acknowledgment of one's sin which is the essential foundation to the securing of salvation.

## **The Wrath of God**

Many today seem to want to downplay and "preach away" the existence of God's wrath against sin. Placating today's "I'm okay, you're okay" cultural sentiments, some express anti-biblical platitudes which decry that "a loving God" would simply not reveal his anger toward mankind whom he loves. Indeed, many are perfectly contented with the idea that God is *incapable* of genuine wrath; claiming that it is outside of his perfect nature to be prone to jealousy and anger. Noting that "God is love" and that everything God does is "inspired by love," some contend that God is incapable of exhibiting wrath because wrath is not motivated by love. These people must not have children.

I love my sons enough to die for them at any given moment. I would not even think twice about it, but would readily throw myself into the path of danger if it threatened them. I am deeply motivated by that love in my choices regarding their care, provision and training. Does this mean that I cannot be angry at them? Does this mean that my wrath cannot be upon them to discipline them from certain actions which I *know* they are better trained than to engage? My own father used to tell me that he was disciplining me *because* he loved me. While I doubted him at the time, I fully understand now that I have two boys of my own, each equipped with their own fully functioning sin nature. The simple truth is, I would *not* be angry for some of their sinful actions were they only someone else's kids, who may not have known better. My anger toward their worst failures only exists *because* of my deep love for them. Another great parent quote represents the issue well: "I love you too much to let you behave that way."

The postulate that God cannot have wrath toward man because "he is love" is a blatant disregard of scripture and a semantical game played by those who desire to please man rather than God. Indeed, if God is *not* angry about man's sin then scripture is intentionally deceptive on the issue, for it heralds dire warnings in light of God's wrath and pending judgment upon those who rebel against him and refuse his righteous standards.

More than 500 times God's wrath is revealed in Old Testament texts. In each case, his wrath is invoked by varying demonstrations of sinfulness from mankind. His anger is neither random nor unreasonable, but focused intently upon those actions which he has revealed to be sinful and antagonistic toward his own character. And, this wrath is poured out upon those whom he openly declares his love for. Wrath and love *are not* mutually exclusive characteristics within God's heart, but rather complement each other quite nicely in their proper contexts. The bible declares that the same God of wrath is also the God of grace, who took his wrath out upon his own willing son, that those who deserved his eternal punishment may be redeemed. (That subject will be dealt with shortly.)

In the New Testament, even gracious Jesus was noted to have expressed anger for the wickedness of men. He exhibited this toward the Pharisees.

***Mark 3:5 (NIV)***

*<sup>5</sup> He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.*

He pointed his anger toward those who had defiled the Temple with commercialism.

***Matthew 21:12-13 (NIV)***

*<sup>12</sup> Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. <sup>13</sup> "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"*

Otherwise in the New Testament, God's anger is pronounced upon sinners in the day of judgment.

***Romans 2:5-8 (NIV)***

*<sup>5</sup> But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> God "will give to each person according to what he has done." <sup>7</sup> To those who by persistence in doing good*

*seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. <sup>8</sup> But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*

Once again it is clear that God's wrath remains upon those who are sinful. If Christ has not removed one's sin by his work on the cross, that one will endure God's wrath for eternity. Clearly, even believers were at one time objects of God's wrath because of that same sin.

***Ephesians 2:3 (NIV)***

*<sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

It was only because they experienced salvation in Christ that believers are noted to have "at one time" been counted as among those whom God's wrath remained.

## Why God is Angry

The idea of an "angry God" is very problematic for some. In such cases, the problem lies in the inability - or unwillingness- of people to receive the teachings of the scriptures concerning the nature of God's wrath. It is not as though God is an unreasonable, hateful or spiteful God who despises his creation out of indifference. Rather, he scorns the sin which has permeated that which he created in perfection. He loathes that which has tainted and marred his own righteous work. In every instance in scripture, God's wrath is noted to be present against man *because of his sin*. As Paul noted,

***Romans 1:18-20 (NIV)***

*<sup>18</sup> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, <sup>19</sup> since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

Notably, God is angry for very righteous reasons. He is angry at the *wickedness* of those who have suppressed His truth. Even today's most relativist thinkers should understand that anger over that which is truly reprehensible is *legitimate* anger. Is it *wrong* for one to be angry over a murder, rape or the death and destruction of terrorism? Or is it *right* to be angry over such degenerate activity?

According to the scripture, anger is a bona-fide characteristic of righteousness. One cannot be truly righteous if he has no inkling of wrath toward that which defiles, destroys and mutilates what is good. News stories of teen mothers tossing their newborns into dumpsters *should make a person indignant!* How much more should the intensely sinful state of humanity cause anger in a supremely righteous God?

Such is the case for God's wrath. It should not be considered uncharacteristic of a righteous and loving God that he exhibits his wrath toward mankind for man's evil deeds. As Paul notes,

***Romans 2:5 (NIV)***

*<sup>5</sup> But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.*

Clearly depicting the end of the matter- an eternal judgment upon sin- Paul notes that it is God's "righteous judgment" which results from his wrath. The conclusion? *Wrath is God's righteous response to evil.* If God were not angry over sin he could not be understood to be righteous, but indifferent and aloof for the affliction which sin yields.

## The Role of God's Anger in Salvation

As noted in the last chapter, it is sin which one is saved *from* in the process of salvation. It is sin which has invoked God's righteous wrath. That "all have sinned" is tantamount to saying that "all are under God's wrath" according to the scriptures.

It is this realization of God's wrath upon the whole of sinful mankind which reveals the true depths of the love of God toward man. With man still under his wrath, God granted his Son as a willing sacrifice to pay the penalty of man's rebellion.

### ***Romans 5:8 (NIV)***

*<sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

While this doctrine will be examined later in this work, suffice it to say at this point, that it was God's own provision which afforded an end to his own wrath. God incarnate, in the person of Jesus Christ, shed his blood that the rightful and just penalty of sin may be paid; thus appeasing God's righteous anger while offering redemption to those who were utterly unworthy of it. Indeed, God *is angry over sin*, but is also very loving in that he provided atonement for those who would receive it.

### ***Romans 3:22-25 (NIV)***

*<sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--*

## Atonement

"Atonement" is a term that describes the making right of man to God. Some have suggested that atonement be understood as "at-one-ment" with God, for the term refers to a reconciliation with God that is granted to sinful man. Atonement is the "making right" of man so that he can be accepted by God and be free. Understanding that sin carries the penalty of death, separation and God's extended wrath toward the sinner brings one to the natural yearning to understand the nature of the provision God has made for the restoration of man from this condition. Atonement is the process whereby the salvation of man is made possible. Obviously, this book is concerned with such illumination; God *has* made atonement available.

Scripture indicates unconditionally that salvation begins with the Lord himself rather than man. While man is involved in the process, this role is secondary and completely dependent upon God's work. For that reason, man has no basis to achieve salvation outside of God's own initiative. Salvation is of the Lord, and is not something which can be stimulated or provided by man in any fashion. The very provision of atonement is something with God alone was able to

offer. He ultimately made atonement for man through the sacrifice of His sinless Son, Jesus Christ, on a cross. But, to fully understand how atonement works, it is good to go back to the Old Testament and see how Jesus fulfilled God's requirements.

There are many who think of Jesus' work on the cross in an unbiblical manner. Some suggest that Jesus was a great example that the world should follow; and that by following His example men are saved from their sin. While it is true that Jesus was an example to us, no one can experience salvation by simply mimicking Jesus' behavior on the earth. Even if a man were able to emulate Jesus, and never sin again, he would still be accountable for sins he had committed earlier. We are all born into sin; thus there is no action we can take to later remedy our original guilt. In short, *you cannot be good enough to merit salvation*, because you still have to pay for your sins committed beforehand.

Others suggest that Jesus was a sort of "do over" for mankind. Because Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life, man was thus somehow enabled to be made right in light of Jesus having "gotten it right." This idea, once again, provides no accounting of individual sins. As has been noted, the scriptures clearly declare that we will each give account of our sins to God.

An example to follow is insufficient to pay for our sins. What we need is *payment*. Our sins are a debt that must be paid by blood according to God's law. Just as God declared in the beginning, "when you eat of it you will die," so the penalty for sin has never changed.<sup>5</sup> Romans, written after the death of Jesus, still confirms,

***Romans 6:23 (ESV)***

*<sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Sin's penalty is death; just as it always was. To understand how God's free gift of eternal life was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, one must understand the nature of the Law of God that Jesus fulfilled. A true understanding of atonement requires a comprehension of the underlying principles which had been put into effect by God prior to Jesus' work on the cross.

Jesus stated,

***Matthew 5:17-18 (NIV)***

*<sup>17</sup>"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup>I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

Fundamentally, it must be understood that Jesus' work on the cross was the *fulfillment* of the law and the prophets. This was Jesus' own testimony; that he had come to fulfill the law, and that the law would remain in effect until "everything is accomplished." It is thus the law itself which one must understand in order to properly connect the dots as to *how* Jesus provided atonement via his crucifixion.

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:17

## Atonement in the Old Testament Law

The “Law” of God revealed in the Old Testament was more than a set of rules as to man’s behavior. It was also Israel’s national legal system by which God revealed himself and enforced his standards of holiness. Israel was a theocracy. God was her King, and his law was her law. For the sake of study it can be noted that there were several types of requirements within it. There were “ceremonial” commandments which provided the proper means by which God was to be worshipped and his people were to conduct themselves with regard to ceremonial cleanliness. There were “moral” commandments which revealed that which was sinful in God’s sight. There were also “legal” commandments which prescribed penal judgments for those who broke the law. The Law of Moses was literally Israel’s constitution and bylaws. It was what people were judged by when they committed a public (or private) offense.

Beyond mere human legal structure, the law also prescribed the system of atonement by which man would have his sins addressed in God’s sight. God’s sentence for sin was made clear in the Garden of Eden, and it has never changed. An essential component of a valid understanding of salvation is the knowledge that sin yields death. Period. And, as all have sinned, all are guilty of breaking God’s law and are thus deserving of his penal sentence.

Even in this hopeless state, God demonstrated his grace in that he provided a system of atonement through the Law, which would later be fulfilled in Christ. He provided a means of *substitution* for the prescribed penalty of death for one’s sin. According to the law, a worthy sacrifice could be offered on man’s behalf, whose blood would pay the guilt of man’s sin.

## The Sacrificial System

The root provision of this system was thus, animal sacrifice. The heart and soul of the Law’s system of atonement involved the spilling of blood. God’s sentence for sin is death to the offender, yet his grace provided that an animal’s blood may be spilled as a substitution for man’s own. Thus the vicarious - or substitutionary - nature of atonement is visible clearly in the Law. The Lord noted,

### ***Leviticus 17:11 (NIV)***

*<sup>11</sup> For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.*

The term “atonement” is translated from the Hebrew term, *kaphar* (kaw-far’), which essentially means “to cover.” This Old Testament understanding of atonement as a “covering” of man’s sin is different from the New Testament Greek term for atonement, which means “reconciliation.” These distinctions will be observed shortly, but suffice it to say that the Old Testament animal sacrificial system provided a temporary covering of man’s sins. Essentially, the shedding of sacrificial blood in the Old Testament translated to one’s sins being covered, or hidden, from God’s sight – that they may not be held against the sinner. Christ’s fulfillment of the sacrificial system wrought a thorough *cleansing* and *removal* of sins, however. Yet, the foundation for understanding Christ’s work is this very sacrificial system of the shedding of vicarious blood.

In Exodus, the process is generally explained:

### ***Exodus 29:10-14 (NIV)***

*<sup>10</sup> "Bring the bull to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands*

on its head. <sup>11</sup> Slaughter it in the Lord's presence at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. <sup>12</sup> Take some of the bull's blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar. <sup>13</sup> Then take all the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys with the fat on them, and burn them on the altar. <sup>14</sup> But burn the bull's flesh and its hide and its offal outside the camp. It is a sin offering.

God's prescription for a sin offering then, was the shedding of substitutionary blood. Blood sacrifices provided a cleansing; for both ceremonial purposes and for the atonement for sins.

**Hebrews 9:22 (NIV)**

<sup>22</sup> *In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

Set apart from the sacrifice of Christ, who once and for all died for sin, the Old Testament sacrifices were a *daily* part of Jewish life. As man continually sinned, so sacrifices had to be continually offered.

The “regular” daily blood offering consisted of the slaughter of two male lambs; one each morning and one each evening.

**Exodus 29:38-39 (NIV)**

<sup>38</sup> *This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. <sup>39</sup> Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight.*

In addition to the daily offerings were weekly Sabbath offerings. On each Sabbath two male lambs were slaughtered in addition to the regular offerings.

**Numbers 28:9-10 (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup> *On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. <sup>10</sup> This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.*

Additionally, each new month began with the sacrifice of two bulls, a ram, seven male lambs and a goat.

**Numbers 28:11 (NIV)**

<sup>11</sup> *On the first of every month, present to the Lord a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect.*

**Numbers 28:15 (NIV)**

<sup>15</sup> *Besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering, one male goat is to be presented to the Lord as a sin offering.*

Added to the continual slaughter of animals for regular calendar cycles were *numerous* offerings which were made at each of Israel's annual feasts. Not all offerings were specifically “sin offerings,” which atoned for man's sin, yet all offerings were necessary *because* of man's sin. Such continual spilling of blood was unavoidably required for man to approach God in worship.

Literally, twenty four hours of every day, sacrifices were being offered on man's behalf. In many cases, priests were little more than specially trained butchers, continually slaughtering

animals to provide atonement for man's continual sin. As Old Testament atonement did not actually *remove* sins, they necessarily were recurrently offered.

**Hebrews 10:11 (NIV)**

<sup>11</sup> *Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.*

Essentially, according to the law, blood was necessary for the atonement (covering – not removal) of sins. God's justice demanded that the penalty of sin be paid. Yet, by God's grace, he allowed a *substitution* to be offered for the death which man had earned by his sin: the substitution of a worthy sacrificial offering. This entire system was a foreshadowing of Christ's own substitutionary death. While the Old Testament sacrificial system did not remove sins, it covered man until such a time as Christ would apply the final, permanent and worthy provision of his own blood.

**Hebrews 10:1-4 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. <sup>2</sup> If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. <sup>3</sup> But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, <sup>4</sup> because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

Yet, as a foreshadowing, this system revealed the substitutionary nature of Christ's own sacrifice which was to come. For Christ to have fulfilled the law, his death necessarily must have provided the means of permanently fulfilling the requirements of blood sacrifice according to the Law.

**Isaiah 53:5 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

**Isaiah 53:6 (NIV)**

<sup>6</sup> *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

**Isaiah 53:12 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

## Yom Kippur - The Foreshadowing of Christ

The culmination of the sacrificial system of atonement in the Old Testament Law was demonstrated and applied in the yearly observation of "Yom Kippur," or, "The Day of Atonement." While the sacrificial system tirelessly went about its business of providing blood offerings – literally twenty four hours a day – this special holy day provided the principle application of the sin offering for the entire nation. As such, Yom Kippur demonstrated more

articulately the nature of Christ's coming work of redemption than perhaps any other requirement of the sacrificial system.

Yom Kippur was the only day of the year in which the inner most room of the Temple, the Holy of Holies (or "the Most Holy Place"), was entered. It was in this inner room that God's presence existed in the Temple. No one was permitted into the Most Holy Place except on Yom Kippur and in the precise manner which God had established. If one should enter that place at a different time – or in an improper manner, they would literally be consumed by fire before the Lord. Such is what happened to Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, when they decided to take a joy ride through the Holy of Holies in Leviticus 10.

***Leviticus 10:1-3 (NIV)***

*<sup>1</sup> Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. <sup>2</sup> So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.'" Aaron remained silent.*

Thus, it must be understood that in the Most Holy Place existed God's literal presence. What happened in this place on Yom Kippur was nothing less than a direct encounter between the high priest and God himself. It is this magnificent presentation of the blood sacrifices on Yom Kippur which the book of Hebrews notes Christ to have completed upon his own substitutionary death; through which he served as both priest and sacrifice.

The entering into the presence of God's Name in the Holy of Holies – to apply the annual sacrifices for sin - was an act for which numerous specific instructions were detailed in Leviticus 16; both to protect the life of the high priest and to make known the holiness of God.

***Leviticus 16:3-5 (NIV)***

*<sup>3</sup> "This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. <sup>4</sup> He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. <sup>5</sup> From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.*

First it may be noted that only the high priest may enter this inner most room. Verse 3 notes specifically how "Aaron" was to enter, as Aaron was the first high priest to perform these duties. Entry into the Holy of Holies was for him alone, as he had very painfully learned by the folly of his two sons. Even the high priest's entry into the presence of God's Name, however, was one of special stipulation. His own sins must first be atoned for that he may survive being in God's presence. Verse 3 notes that he is to enter the sanctuary area "with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering."

The sin offering of the young bull was to atone for Aaron's sins. Although he was high priest, he was yet a sinner and in need of cleansing himself before he could enter God's presence. Before Aaron ever enters the Most Holy Place, he will sacrifice this bull for his own sins and the sins of his family.

Aaron also would present a ram as a burnt offering. The burnt offering is not for the forgiveness of sins, but rather is an offering which Lev. 1:13 notes to be "an aroma pleasing to the LORD."

Proper clothing was also required. Verse 4 notes a sacred linen tunic, linen undergarments, linen sash and turban. With proper sacred garments came also a ceremonial bath (v4).

The last elements of preparation were two male goats and a ram for the people of Israel. The goats would serve as a sin offering and scapegoat while the ram would serve as another burnt offering on behalf of the nation.

The purposes of each offering are noted in verses 6-10:

***Leviticus 16:6-10 (NIV)***

*<sup>6</sup> "Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. <sup>7</sup> Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. <sup>8</sup> He is to cast lots for the two goats--one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat. <sup>9</sup> Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord and sacrifice it for a sin offering. <sup>10</sup> But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.*

Of the two goats, one will be sacrificed while the other will serve as the scapegoat; a goat which will symbolically carry the sins of Israel away from the people. The high priest was to cast lots to determine which goat was sacrificed and which was to be the scapegoat.

Finally, verses 11-28 reveal the process by which these sacrifices were to be made.

First, Aaron was to deal with his own sin- and the sin of his immediate family – by the presentation of the bull.

***Leviticus 16:11-14 (NIV)***

*<sup>11</sup> "Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. <sup>12</sup> He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. <sup>13</sup> He is to put the incense on the fire before the Lord, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. <sup>14</sup> He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.*

After slaughtering the bull, but before entering the Holy of Holies, Aaron is to “take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord.” With these coals he also takes “two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense.” Before any further actions inside the inner most place occur, Aaron is to create a literal smokescreen to conceal himself from the Lord’s presence. Under normal circumstance, no one was able to see God’s presence in the inner most room, as a huge curtain completely shielded the Holy of Holies from human eyes. On this day, however, because he must work behind the curtain, another shield was required to hide his eyes from the Lord’s presence. As God had explained to Moses, “no one may see me and live.” (Ex. 33:20) Thus, the high priest must enter through the curtain and put incense on the coals which immediately created a sweet-smelling smoky curtain. This curtain of smoke shielded him from looking directly upon God’s presence “so that he will not die.”

With this protective smoke covering, he then applied the blood of the bull for his own sins by sprinkling seven times before the atonement cover (the ark). Now, with his own sins atoned for,

the priest is able to leave to prepare the sacrifice for the nation. This completes the first of two entries into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

The atonement provision for the nation is detailed in verse 15-19:

***Leviticus 16:15-17 (ESV)***

<sup>15</sup> *“Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.*

<sup>16</sup> *Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.*

<sup>17</sup> *No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel.*

In the same manner as the high priest presented the bull before the Lord, he would enter the Holy of Holies a second time to present the goat's blood for the nation's sins. As with the bull, the goat's blood was sprinkled upon the mercy seat and in front of it. This atonement provided for all manners of sin which the Israelites were guilty.

First is noted that “the Israelites were unclean.” This refers to their natural sinful condition, or their “unwitting” sinfulness. Next is noted their “rebellious acts,” which refers to their intentional disobedience to God's law.

While more is noted concerning the activities of the Day of Atonement, these are the essential sacrifices offered “for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel.”

Verses 18 and 19 refer to the high priest's sprinkling the blood on the altar to cleanse that area, thus declaring the altar which burns the daily sacrifices as cleansed as well.

Finally, the sins of the people are transferred to the scapegoat in verses 20-22:

***Leviticus 16:20-22 (ESV)***

<sup>20</sup> *“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat.*

<sup>21</sup> *And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.*

<sup>22</sup> *The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.*

Placing his hands on the scapegoat, he confesses Israel's sins and “put them on the head of the goat.” An appointed man will then release the goat into the desert, representing to the nation that their sins have left them.

Much more can be noted about Yom Kippur, but as essential preparatory knowledge for the nature of atonement, this sufficiently introduces the foreshadowing portrait of what Christ later completed upon the cross.

## Jesus: The Fulfillment of the Law

While such knowledge of the Old Testament system is certainly not a prerequisite for one's salvation, it is the very foundation by which one may truly comprehend the work of the cross. Jesus took great care to present the manner of his work as something which built upon that which God had already revealed. He continually quoted the Law and the Prophets. He made examples of the men of faith who had forged the work of the Kingdom in the Old Testament. Salvation by grace through faith is not something new, but rather something which utterly permeated the scriptures prior to the time of Christ. What became new was that the *substance* of such faith was finally revealed and fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

While the common sentiment for believers in Christ today is to focus their discipleship journey on the New Testament, one must never forget that the New Testament is *not* something which is entirely "new," but rather the completion of that which had been shadowed and typed from the very beginning. It is no coincidence that a lamb was to be slaughtered by the Israelites in Egypt in order that the death angel may pass them by. It was no paradox that Jesus was crucified during Passover, participating in the Feast of Unleavened Bread the night before he suffered (Matthew 26:17) or that John the Baptist introduced him to Israel with the seemingly strange announcement, "behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29)." Indeed, the biggest mistake one can make in one's journey to understand the doctrines of salvation is to understand them as something which were thrust upon history uniquely in the first century. Substitutionary atonement had been revealed, defined and practiced – albeit in imperfection – long before Jesus arrived to fulfill and complete the work which God had prescribed via the bloodshed of the Law.

When Jesus said that he had come "to fulfill" the Law and the Prophets, that is precisely what he meant.

The law stipulated that sin could be cleansed solely by sacrificial blood. Jesus spilt *the* blood which would once and for all complete the work of God's legal requirements in the matter. The law stated the nature of the sacrifice; a male without blemish or defect. Christ alone lived such a life among men that he may be such a satisfactory offering. Christ alone was born of a virgin and was without the inherited sin nature of Adam. Christ alone lived out a life free of sin; either inherited or intentional.

The prophets noted two general veins of revelation concerning Christ. One set of prophecies concerning him was that he would serve as a substitutionary atonement, thus fulfilling the law (Isaiah 53). Another set of prophecies revealed his second coming as King. His coming as King involves prophecies which remain yet to be fulfilled in completion. Yet, his coming as a substitutionary atonement was utterly realized on the cross. The Law and the Prophets foretold the mission and nature of Christ's work. Christ declared the Law and his first-advent prophecies fulfilled in his final words, "it is finished" (Mark 13:26). He will fulfill the second-advent prophecies upon his return (Heb. 9:28).

While Christ's fulfillment of such prophecy is a concern for other books, it is his fulfillment of the Law – which is very much completed – that one must comprehend in order to have a healthy understanding of the atonement he afforded in his death. Concerning that status, the book of Hebrews has much to say of Christ's finishing work of the Law.

A preliminary proclamation from the book of Hebrews sets the table perfectly for such understanding to take root. In chapter ten, the author heartily proclaims the utter inability for the work of redemption to have been completed by the Law outside of Christ's "finishing" work. He states,

**Hebrews 10:1-4 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?

<sup>3</sup> But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.

<sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Articulating a wonderfully simple question, he deduces that if the sacrifices of the Law could have made "perfect those who draw near" then "would they not have ceased to be offered?" Obviously, the sacrifices of the law were *not* the full fruition of atonement, but "a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." This "shadow" of the Law prepared man for the reality which would be revealed in Christ; a blood sacrifice which would permanently apply for sins, never to be repeated.

**Hebrews 9:11-12 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)

<sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Fulfilling in every way the foreshadowing sacrifices of the Law, Jesus obtained eternal redemption as the reality to which the shadow pointed. Even the tabernacle itself was a mere sketch of what was permanently enduring; a "greater and more perfect tent" that is not man-made.

**Hebrews 9:24-25 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

<sup>25</sup> Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own....

The result of such a transaction was that the full and singular atonement for sin – which the shadow of the law had pointed to – was now applied before the very throne of God; in full manifest glory in the heavenly temple. As the high priest offered the blood of bulls and goats for sins, even he was a shadow of a priest to come. In the presentation of himself, Jesus became the tangible fulfillment of both priest and offering.

**Hebrews 9:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Several important realizations should consume the grateful hearts of those who have been reunited to God in Christ based on this revelation of Hebrews.

First, one should be articulately aware of the price of redemption. The penalty of sin, required from the very beginning -“the day you eat of it you will surely die” - has been paid. Never again must blood be spilt. Never again should one consider oneself in need of reparations for sin. That price is paid. Any attempt at adding to the work of the perfect sacrifice of Christ only serves to diminish its value. This is not to say that good works are not to be engaged by the faithful believer, but that such works are the rightful *response to* salvation in light of his mercy (Rom. 12:1-2) – they in no way contribute to the *substance* of atonement. Sadly, entire subcultures remain – even in the church itself - which believe that such good works will acquire themselves an inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Yet, only one work was sufficient to fulfill the law; and it was the law which needed settlement that one not be judged by it.

Secondly, the understanding should be solidified that Christ’s work of atonement is undeniably *substitutionary* in nature. The Old Testament legal system was unconditionally substitutionary – by God’s own Word:

***Leviticus 17:11 (NIV)***

*<sup>11</sup> For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.*

Christ noted specifically his task to fulfill this law, rendering the shadowy picture it portrayed into the reality of his own righteous blood being offered before God in the heavenly tabernacle. Thus, if the law was substitutionary, and Christ fulfilled the law, Christ’s atonement was itself substitutionary. No other understanding of atonement adequately represents the scriptural testimony concerning this work. God gave the law. God provided the shadowy and temporary substitutionary system which pointed men rightly to understand that which was to come as its fulfillment. God provided the perfect and eternal reality of Christ which completed the promise to its fullest end.

***Hebrews 10:19-22 (ESV)***

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,  
<sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,  
<sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God,  
<sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

While many doctrines of the Bible may be considered debatable and non-essential, this is the one doctrine no person can afford to get wrong.

Salvation is the complete forgiveness of sin to those who receive it. Salvation is the payment of death, by the only innocent Son of God, on behalf of the guilty.

***Colossians 2:13-15 (ESV)***

*<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,  
<sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.  
<sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

# The Elements of the Gospel

## Grace: The Overriding Condition of Salvation

Understanding the nature of the atonement expressed thus far – that Christ fulfilled the substitutionary blood atonement system of the Old Testament – leads one to next evaluate the elements of the gospel which bring one along the path into fellowship with Christ. The mere knowledge of such glorious principles alone does not transform one automatically into conversion (James 2:19). Rather, a transformational process which far supersedes intellect takes place to usher one into regeneration. The next several posts will examine the “elements” which come into play during one’s conversion process. These elements are each taught by scripture to be a part of the conversion experience.

When one bakes a cake, it is imperative that the proper ingredients be assimilated according to a recipe. If one should forget the flour or sugar, it becomes not a cake that one bakes, but something else altogether. While the attaining of the proper ingredient list is essential, there are also instructions which must be done in a certain order. You cannot, for example, “mix on high for 30 seconds” before the final ingredients are added. Nor can you “bake at 350 degrees” prior to mixing.

Many who delve into studies on soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) focus much attention to the details of the *order* which ingredients are to be added to the mixture which produces salvation. Some contend that repentance is a necessary step *prior* to actual regeneration. Others insist that regeneration is the *response* of one’s actual regeneration, and that it happens after the fact. While these debates are wholesome, they go beyond the scope of this “pastoral” study on salvation. However, it is absolutely imperative that one understand what goes into this recipe we refer to as “the gospel.” If one’s cake comes out of the oven un-risen, he can know that he did not get the recipe correct. He does not have cake. He has a chocolate door mat. Likewise, if one presumes to have heard the Word of God and to have thereby been converted, yet he is unrepentant, fails to love Christ and has no commitment to serving Him as Lord, he too has missed an important ingredient (or more) along the way. He is not a true disciple of Christ any more than the un-risen hard-baked batter-platter is cake.

To compile the vital components of the gospel, one must necessarily begin with the element which surpasses all others, for without it no one can be saved. That pre-conditional attribute is called “grace.”

## The Nature of Grace

Grace is translated in the New Testament from the Greek term *charis* (khar’is), which is defined as “a manner or act imparting acceptability or favor on another.” Inherent in this definition is the “imparted” nature of grace. Grace is something which is given by a capable party to one who is utterly incapable of attaining it on his own. Thus, it is “imparted,” but cannot be earned. A common and good theological description of grace is that it is “God’s unmerited favor toward man.”

Another way of understanding the nature of grace is to fully comprehend what grace *is not*. Grace *is not* tantamount to recompense or reward. It is quite the opposite. Illuminating this distinction clearly, Paul notes that

**Romans 6:23 (NIV)**

<sup>23</sup> ... *the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul beautifully sets up a contrast between works and grace in this sentence. On the “works” side of his equation, he notes that the “wages of sin” is death. Wages are what one earns for one’s works. In this case, one’s works are sin and the wage earned is death, which is the opposite of salvation. On the other side of the equation is the utter antithesis of such works and wages as Paul notes, “but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” A gift is categorically contrary to a wage. Gifts are not earned, but are given unmeritoriously. Otherwise, it would not be a gift at all, but a wage. This text, while not utilizing the term, teaches clearly the underlying principle of the basis of salvation. It is by grace. Salvation is granted to those who have not earned it.

Ephesians 2:8 will be examined momentarily, but at this point let us observe its core principle as the foundation by which one is capable of being saved. Paul states in this text that “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing.” If one is saved “by grace,” then one has no proper cause to think that any part of salvation can be obtained by one’s own human works. Grace is completely opposed to the idea of one “accomplishing” salvation. Any and all supposed doctrines which teach that one can “achieve” salvation through right living, proper ingestion of sacramental activities, self-flagellation or any other humanly-powered practice is utterly in contempt of scripture.

Contrarily, the biblical doctrine of grace proclaims that men are incapable of redemption outside of Christ. Scripture reveals that

**Romans 5:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*

The term translated “weak” in the ESV is the Greek word *asthenes*, which means utterly “without strength” or “powerless.” One who is powerless is by definition one that can do absolutely nothing. It is in response to man’s inability that Christ worked on his behalf, offering himself as a substitutionary atonement. Likewise, Ephesians notes,

**Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*

<sup>9</sup> *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

In case one should misunderstand, Paul explains articulately that salvation is “not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” He affirms that salvation – being by grace – is “not of your own doing.” As grace, it “is the gift of God” to those who are unworthy, incapable and unwilling. Thus, not only is grace something entirely separate from man’s works, it is in fact something provided *in spite* of them. Christ’s provision of atonement was given to those who were powerless, as a gift, by Christ’s dying *for the ungodly*.

Sadly, the prominent message on the streets today is that one may indeed find favor with God if he only “does enough” or “lives rightly” enough that his good deeds will outweigh his bad. This false hope is based on the presumption that sin can be undone by good works. Yet, as revealed earlier in this series, sin demands punishment in God’s sight, not restitution via community services. Contrarily,

**Titus 3:4-7 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> ... when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,  
<sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy,  
by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,  
<sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,  
<sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Paul also noted that,

**Galatians 5:4 (NIV)**

<sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

Dear friends, *there is absolutely nothing you can do* to atone for your sins. Even one who repents of his sin and lives utterly right before God for every remaining moment of his life – if that were possible – would still have to give account for the sins of his past. That accounting would sentence him to death. Only grace – God’s unmerited favor – can rescue us from our predicament.

**The Application of Grace**

Simply knowing that grace is required still leaves open questions concerning how exactly such grace has been apportioned. Clearly the provision has been made first of all by the very atonement itself. Had God not sent Christ to die for the sins of man, all other arguments concerning salvation would be null and void. The whole of scripture pointed toward a Messiah who would redeem man from the penalty of his sin. While the law was a foreshadowing, it did not *remove* sins. Only Christ could do that by vicariously offering his own righteous blood in our stead. As John noted,

**1 John 4:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

Beyond the provision of atonement lies another act of grace by which men must be saved. That act of Grace is imparted by God’s call to the sinner. While the payment for sin has been secured, men remain incapable of receiving it outside of God’s grace upon them as he enables them by the Holy Spirit to do so. Jesus noted,

**John 6:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

As such, one does not simply wake up on some particular day and make the intellectual decision to pursue salvation. While men *may* make a purely academic choice to pursue *religion*, the draw to true redemption is itself given by the Lord. This, too, is an act of grace. If no one can come unless the Father draws him, then even the very pursuit of redemption is one which is called by God. Indeed, conviction of sins- which is necessary for salvation- is itself an act of the Holy Spirit. Guilt can be manufactured by men, of course, but true repentance is the result of the conviction of the Holy Spirit. These additional elements of the gospel will be examined shortly, but at this time it must be underscored completely that salvation is unconditionally an act of God’s grace. Every other call of scripture concerning faith, repentance and the trust in the

Lordship of Christ hinges on the impartation of God's grace, without which Christ would not have been offered nor would one be so inclined to be purchased out of his sin.

***Romans 5:20-21 (ESV)***

<sup>20</sup> *Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,*

<sup>21</sup> *so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Thus, salvation is not something that can be earned by man. It was in fact earned by Christ, who lived a perfect life and gave himself as a payment for our sins. His work has been freely offered to those who believe. It cannot be afforded by any other means.

## **Faith**

While grace is the overriding precondition of the gospel, scripture unyieldingly asserts that faith is the necessary component by which salvation is applied to the sinner's account. Ephesians 2:8 notes both elements quite clearly, asserting, "For by grace you have been saved *through faith*." Likewise, Hebrews 11:6 notes that "without faith it is impossible to please God," demanding that God's acceptance of man in some way hinges on the existence of essential faith. While faith in no way trumps grace - nor can it exist outside of grace - it is nonetheless a required component of the receipt of salvation which cannot be subverted. One simply cannot be saved without faith.

### ***The Substance of Faith***

The term "faith" is translated from the Greek term, *pistis*, (pis'-tis), which is roughly defined as "persuasion," "conviction (of a truth)," or "reliance." Inherent in this definition is the necessity that one must have a foundational "belief" in something for such persuasion or reliance to depend. Yet, such should not be understood as a merely academic thought process, but an *active conviction* which is inspired by true confidence. One may believe it is going to rain on a given day, yet not strongly enough that he changes his plans or carries an umbrella under his arm. In such cases, a static rational belief exists, yet the biblical burden of a demonstration of faith has not been met.

As presented in scripture, faith is best understood as a two-tiered mechanism incorporating not only a foundational *assertion* of a certain truth, but also a reciprocating and dynamic *resolve* to such conviction. As such, biblical faith demands that the aforementioned man (who believes it is going to rain) arm himself with boots, a raincoat and an altered schedule for the day's events. His belief is not merely an intellectual position but a life-altering certainty of mind and will.

The foundation of belief as a component of faith is clear enough in passages such as Galatians 3:22, noting that salvation is "given to those who believe." Likewise, as noted moments ago, Hebrews 11:6 states that "without faith it is impossible to please (God,) for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

Yet, faith is not merely theoretical. It is also practical. A second component of faith - beyond static belief - is present in scripture which propels one's cognitive position into an operational status. In conjunction to a compelling belief, sincere faith necessarily requires a compulsory resolve. Thus, the second tier of biblical faith is that of "operation," or a properly motivated response to one's belief.

James describes the paradigm in this way:

**James 2:14-17 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?*

<sup>15</sup> *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,*

<sup>16</sup> *and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?*

<sup>17</sup> *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

James clearly identifies a connection between one's supposed belief system and an appropriately motivated response to its foundational tenets. James almost ridicules "that faith" one would assume to be based in intellect alone, noting that "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." This dead faith is described as that which "someone says he has" if no deeds follow it. Plainly a dividing line exists between clinically "believing" and/or articulating something and concretely "resolving to live" as though the belief were true. "That faith," as James calls it, is illegitimate if not accompanied by a proper response.

To further illustrate, James goes on to say,

**James 2:18-19 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> *But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

<sup>19</sup> *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

There exists a great chasm then between simply declaring a belief and having a response-oriented and "living" faith; a chasm stretching the vast distance between God's beloved children and the demonic realm itself! For "*even the demons believe (that there is one God) and shudder.*" What demon exists who does not believe in God? What demon lurks who does not believe that Christ is the Son of God and that he was crucified, buried and resurrected? Not only do the demons believe such things – they *know* such truths intimately! They were *in attendance* when God spoke the earth. They were *witnesses* to the fall of man, the establishment of the covenants and the very life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ himself. Their "belief" – as far as stagnant clinical knowledge goes – is unassailable in its clarity. Yet they remain utterly condemned; according to James no different than one who claims a belief without a resolve to act accordingly. James could not have made a finer illustration of his point. True faith initiates response. It is not based entirely upon right thinking - though right thinking is certainly required – but upon the product of right thinking.

Jesus noted this principle as follows:

**John 14:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.*

Jesus' assertion concerning one's demonstration of faith was not that one would merely "think like I've been thinking," but that one would "do what I have been doing." While belief is certainly an element of faith, the response that such belief should inspire cannot be separated out of legitimate faith.

Paul concurs in Romans 1:5 that Jesus Christ,

**Romans 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,*

The faith he speaks of produced the response of obedience, not right thinking alone. Faith is a *belief which motivates* one to action.

The faith “hall of fame” in Hebrews 11 is a veritable treatise of this principle in action. Each are commended for their faith. Each believed God – and responded appropriately. (v4) By faith Abel *offered* a better sacrifice than Cain. (v7) By faith Noah *built* an ark. (v8) By faith Abraham *obeyed and went* to the place he was called. (v17) By faith he *offered* Isaac as a sacrifice. (v20) By faith Isaac *blessed* Jacob and Esau. (v23) By faith Moses’ parents *hid him*. (v29) By faith the people (Israel) *passed through* the Red Sea. In these circumstances men are commended for their faith – which was demonstrated through their *resolve and response* to that which they believed. Would Israel have been commended for their faith if they refused to set foot into the Red Sea? Would Abraham be commended for his faith had he denied the journey to which God called him? Would Moses parents be celebrated for refusing to put him in the bulrushes? In every circumstance where faith is exhibited in scripture it is something which yields a lifestyle commitment to the profession of one’s belief.

Over the course of years I have come to a short but inclusive definition of faith from a biblical perspective. That working definition is that faith is “a belief which convicts one to response.” This simple characterization understands that one first believes and becomes therefore compelled to respond. Without action faith is dead. Without belief only dead works are achievable. It is belief convicting one to action which is required of one to be brought into the Kingdom of God.

***The Stipulation of Faith***

The doctrines declaring the application of faith as a requirement for one’s salvation permeate the New Testament. Already noted is Ephesians, which determines declaratively that it is “through faith” one is saved by grace. Likewise, Paul writes in his mini gospel treatise in Romans 3 that righteousness comes “through faith in Jesus Christ,” while still asserting wholeheartedly that justification is given freely “by his grace.”

**Romans 3:22-24 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:*

<sup>23</sup> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

<sup>24</sup> *and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

Clearly, beyond grace having been given to the sinner, faith accompanies salvation to those who believe. Indeed, the author of Hebrews notes the distinction between those who hear the gospel and are saved and those who hear it and remain lost in their sins. He states,

**Hebrews 4:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> *For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.*

Akin to James’ demons who believed and yet had not faith, here again the absence of faith relegates those who heard a right message to continue under God’s wrath. It is because they did not combine the gospel with faith that the message was of no saving value to them.

Faith is an essential element of the gospel. Without it no one can be saved. Faith depends on one believing the right message of the gospel and resolving to live based upon such— all of which never leave the confines of God’s providential grace. Such faith is foundational, as Paul’s Damascus Road conversation with Christ revealed:

***Acts 26:15-18 (ESV)***

<sup>15</sup> *And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.*

<sup>16</sup> *But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,*

<sup>17</sup> *delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles— to whom I am sending you*

<sup>18</sup> *to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’*

### ***The Source of Faith***

Since faith is required for salvation, one’s natural focus might next be aimed at determining where or how such faith may be acquired. Are there certain steps one must take in order to secure such faith for oneself? Is there a proper pursuit which would lead one into a status whereby faith could be raised up? The short answer is “no.” There is nothing a man can do to establish himself as a candidate for faith; it is an ability which God provides to man by grace, the overriding condition of salvation. God’s grace supersedes any and all other elements of the gospel, thus making one’s salvation “not from yourselves,” but “the gift of God.”

Faith, like grace, is God’s own work. Let me quickly retort however that this does not eliminate man’s participation in the gospel transaction, as some are quick to assert. The point being made at this time is that man cannot *produce* his own capacity for faith in Christ. Christ produces faith capacity within man. Scripture indicates that it is God’s word which He provides as the source of such enablement.

Paul notes this dynamic clearly in Romans 10:16-17 concerning Israel’s hearing of the gospel of Christ.

***Romans 10:16-17 (ESV)***

<sup>16</sup> *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”*

<sup>17</sup> *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

This text reveals clearly both the opportunity of faith granted by Christ’s word and the response attributed to those who hear it. If “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” then none are capable of such faith outside of having heard from Christ directly through his word.

John also contends that the hearing of the Word of God is the vessel by which God provisions faith. He states,

***John 20:30-31 (ESV)***

<sup>30</sup> *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;*

<sup>31</sup> *but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Jesus' testimony was thus written by John "that you may believe" and "that by believing you may have life in his name." This belief - a fundamental component of faith - was acquired by God's own work of the provisioning of his word through John's testimony. Once again, hearing is "through the word of Christ."

Paul further illustrates this truth as he reminds Timothy,

**2 Timothy 3:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> *and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Thus, the opportunity for faith comes by God's own power through the hearing of the message. As noted earlier, this message is commonly referred to as "the gospel," or "the good news." The gospel is God's word concerning God's grace which was revealed through the provision of the substitutionary atonement of the righteous Christ. Calls to faith are granted by the Lord himself by grace - from first to last. This faith is provisioned by God through the preaching of the gospel; the very means by which God reveals himself to those who will exercise their faith.

**Romans 1:16-17 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

<sup>17</sup> *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

## Repentance: The Product of Faith

Faith, as noted, is not simply an intellectual belief, but a whole-hearted investment in the object of such faith. A person with faith believes something to the extent that trust is actually exhibited in the belief. One believes a chair can hold him up, thus he sits. And, one believes the message of the cross, thus one resolves himself - confidently - to that message. Such faith causes one to have a secure and absolute resolve to trust Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and restoration to God. The end result of faith then, is the turning from self sufficiency and sin to a dependence upon God in Christ to provide salvation.

The term "repentance" is used throughout the scripture to refer to one's response to sin by faith. Repent comes from the Greek term, *metanoeo*, which is a compound term, based the term *meta*, and *noeo*. *Meta* is a preposition denoting accompaniment with something else - akin to the English terms "with" or "among" or "after" at times. *Noeo*, means "understand" or "perceive." Thus, in function and use, "repent" means to "think differently" or to "reconsider." The term is used to denote a change of direction. Literally, a thing headed in one direction which repents will begin to head in the opposite direction, having "reconsidered" the course and choosing another route.

In light of the gospel, repentance is one of two options one has upon the recognition of his sinful condition. He may choose to ignore his sin and continue on his current path to judgment. Or, he may choose to repent: reconsidering and reversing his former course.

Repentance does not mean that one becomes impervious to sin. It does not mean that one completely eradicates sin from one's life. Such is not possible on this earth. We are all sinful at our core. Rather, repentance means to turn from our sins in such a way that we purpose ourselves to serve Christ as we should, with full knowledge that we will at times fail in that course. On a larger scale, repentance has to do with our response to God. Repentance is the decision to acknowledge God as right about our sin. He is just to condemn us. We are indeed sinful and worthy of his judgment. Yet, by faith we understand that Christ has taken our sin upon himself; having died on the cross to pay the punitive damages for our sinful actions. Thus, in repentance we turn from our life of sin and turn to Christ in the faithful trust that his death on the cross is sufficient to pay our penalty.

Jesus spoke of such repentance when he noted,

***Mark 1:15 (ESV)***

<sup>15</sup> ... *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

The repentance Jesus spoke of was that people were to turn in belief of the gospel. These words of repentance were spoken to a generation of people who believed that their religious heritage would save them. Repentance means to turn from any and all other means of salvation and to trust Christ alone to save.

Peter, likewise noted,

***Acts 3:19-20 (ESV)***

<sup>19</sup> *Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,*

<sup>20</sup> *that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord....*

The repentance required for receipt of the gospel is a repentance concerning the person of Jesus Christ. It is to change one's mind and direction concerning who Christ is. Jesus has died for man's sins; thus repenting to receive him is necessarily an acknowledgement of one's own sin, but not necessarily an understanding of the full depth of one's depravity.

To comprehend who Jesus is, is not sufficient for salvation. Rather, true faith will compel one to commit to such comprehension in repentance – a change of direction which is in concert with one's faith in who Christ is. Repentance is the response to faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

Paul noted of,

***Acts 20:21 (ESV)***

<sup>21</sup> *testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Repentance, as the result of faith, leads one to know full well that Jesus Christ is God, Lord and Savior of their lives over sin. As such, one does not come to Christ for the free gift of salvation without a full and knowing acquiescence of His deity and rule. Mere "belief" *can be* simply a static affirmation without life change. Faith is neither static nor lacking in repentance; it urges the believer to unconditionally trust in Christ alone as the guarantor of salvation; the fruit of repentance.

Paul testified to King Agrippa in Acts concerning his call from Christ. He noted that Christ had called him to preach the gospel,

**Acts 26:18-20 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> *to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*

He continues,

<sup>19</sup> *"Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,*  
<sup>20</sup> *but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.*

Thus, repentance is turning to God and engaging a new life in Christ "in keeping with their repentance."

The gospel call is a call to believe the written word of God. It is a call to understand that Christ fulfilled the law by offering Himself as the final, unmitigated payment for sins. It is faith which leads to repentance; turning from your former life of sin and death to Christ's forgiveness and a life of service to Him as Lord and King. This *does not mean* that one "earns" their salvation by doing the right types of service. Such is impossible. Salvation is granted by grace solely through God's work. But it is one's response to Christ in faith which produces repentance leading to the service of Christ.

As noted, repentance denotes a "change of direction." It is agreeing with God about one's sinfulness, then *changing to God's direction* concerning that condition. Just as faith produces repentance, so repentance produces a life of dependence on Christ. One is not truly repentant if they only have sorrow, but make no change in direction. Rather, repentance is the agreement with God about one's sin, and the accompanying *action* of agreeing with God concerning one's sinful estate. Paul noted,

**Romans 10:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

<sup>10</sup> *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

Paul asserts that the confession, "Jesus is Lord" is the essential confessional element of one's action of faith and repentance. Thus, one must necessarily not only repent *from* his life of self-rule and sin, but must repent *to* Christ as the Lord and sovereign of his life. This is not separate from the belief, and action of faith which draws one to repentance; Christ must be *believed* prior to such confessional action of faith, yet one cannot simply "understand" who Christ is and be saved. One must invest themselves into the repentant step of confessing Christ as the Lord.

This is the very process noted in Acts,

**Acts 20:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> *testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The *repentance* was that one would "turn to God" and "have faith in our Lord Jesus." One is not truly repentant concerning his life of sin and self-governance without his necessary submission

to the rightful Lord of his life. One's faith in Christ demands the repentance step of *turning his life over* to the Lord, Christ. Paul notes,

**2 Corinthians 5:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> *and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

Clearly, “those who live,” – referring to those who have *eternal* life – “might no longer live for themselves,” but rather “for him who for their sake died and was raised.” Paul makes no argument over the nature of the redeemed. They who are redeemed are those who live for the Lord, Christ. This was also Jesus' own testimony of the salvation he offers. He stated,

**John 10:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*

Simply put, “they follow me.”

Many are the occasions when one presumes to become a disciple of Christ while others around find themselves unable to see any such evidence of a change of mind. Indeed, there are many who presume that salvation is a separate action from the assignment of the Lordship of Christ in the lives of believers. Frequently, the argument is made that a “changed life” is not one and the same as one who has been redeemed. This assertion is true on one count; for a changed life is not *proof* that one has been redeemed. One can have their life changed from a winning lottery ticket or a new job. While it is true that a changed life does not prove salvation, it is *not* true that salvation will fail to result in a changed life. One who is not saved does not obey and follow Christ but one who is truly saved does, to the best of his ability. John said,

**1 John 2:2-6 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

<sup>3</sup> *And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.*

<sup>4</sup> *Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,*

<sup>5</sup> *but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:*

<sup>6</sup> *whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

According to John, the proof of salvation is demonstrated in that believers “obey his commands.” It is simply not biblical theology that one can be truly saved and *not* have his life changed (repented) to the point where he begins to follow Christ in servitude.

The process of repentance involves a personal change of direction concerning the person of Jesus Christ. By agreeing with God about our sinfulness we necessarily set ourselves up for the responsive action of committing ourselves to *obedience* through the power which Christ provides us.

Thus, the substance of the “change of mind” our repentance brings is the commitment of accepting Jesus Christ as the Lord of our lives and living according to his principles to the best of our abilities.

## What Must I do to be Saved?

While this work has spent considerable effort to discuss the process whereby God works to save and restore people to Himself, the overriding question for most of us boils down to "what must I do to be saved?" While salvation is clearly God's work, it does indeed express itself in real time in the hearts of man. Simply put, if God is working in your life, he will lead you to a point of understanding, faith and commitment to this gospel message whereby you can be saved.

The first part of God's program of redemption is the realization of sin. When God convicts us of sin, we know that we have fallen short of his perfect law. We acknowledge that we have lied, cheated, stolen and failed in more ways than we can even remember. If this has been revealed to you, then follow the biblical mandate to agree with God concerning your sin. John noted,

**1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Thus, you should confess your sin to God. Pray to him and agree that you are sinful and in need of his forgiveness. If, however, you are unable to agree with God about your sin, then you are simply not ready to receive the good news of Christ's forgiveness by faith. Sin is our issue with God. No man can be saved until he understands and accepts his offense before God.

The next part of God's redemptive work is *faith* in the gospel message of the Bible. Believe that Jesus was God's Son, that he lived a perfect life - without sin - and died to pay the penalty for your sins on a cross. He was raised to life to prove himself as a worthy payment for sin and that He was God in the flesh. As noted earlier, true faith is not only "thinking" something as true, but having the resolve to live as though it is true. Thus, the fruition of true faith is that one asks God to forgive his sins because of Christ's sacrifice, and then *trusts* that Christ is sufficient to save. In short, trust Christ alone to be your payment for sins. He died to pay your penalty for sin; so live as though His payment is sufficient. Accept that your sin is paid by his gift of grace.

In conjunction with your faith that Christ is able to save you, repent of your sins. Turn from your sinful life to Christ. This does not mean that you will be perfect; for none of us are. But it means that you commit yourself to Christ as God and Lord and determine yourself to follow him with your full will. Repentance is the process whereby we abandon our life without God and pursue His service. Find yourself a Bible-preaching church where you can learn God's Word and his ways. Submit yourself to his leadership in your life that you may live as he desires and abandon your former life of self-sufficiency and self-rule. Consider that you belong to Him, and that his plans are now your own. Paul noted,

**Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

*<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

This is the confession of a believer: that my life belongs to God. I am here to serve him in response to his great grace toward me and my sin. Salvation is the greatest gift any man has ever received. It is given to those who are utterly unworthy of it, by him who alone can provide it. It cannot be taken away by any man, government or philosophy. It was secured by blood, proven

by the resurrection of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit, who now indwells those who have called on Christ by faith.

The work of salvation is an ongoing reality in the life of a believer. Forgiveness is granted immediately, but our work of repentance and service is life-long, until the time when we realize the full fruition of salvation; which is eternal life with God in Heaven.

May you place your faith in the gospel message and be saved by Christ from your sins.