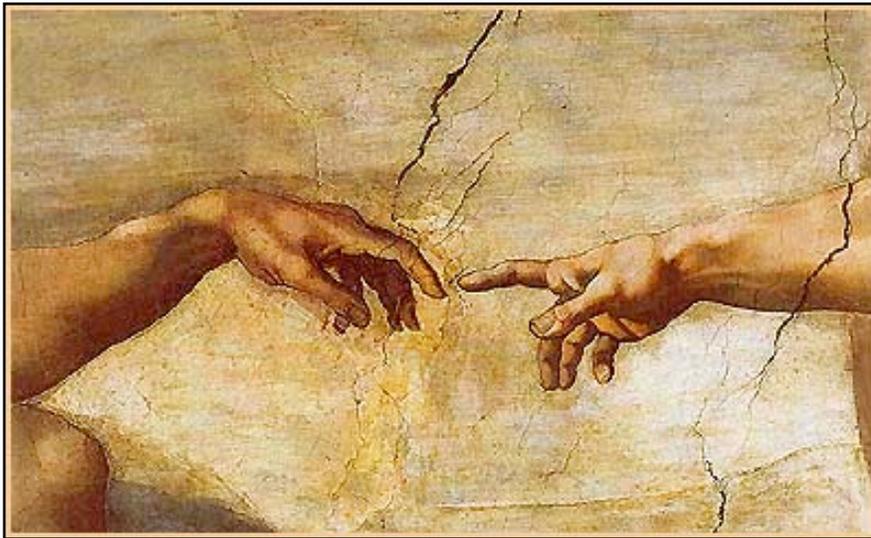


# What's Salvation All About?

## A Biblical Perspective

by *Tim Clark*



***“For Christ  
died for sins  
once for all,  
the righteous  
for the  
unrighteous,  
to bring you  
to God.”***

***1Peter 3:18a***

Very simply, salvation is about solving a personal problem. The personal problem is that of our own individual sin. Sin is nothing more than our rebellion against God's commands for our life. When we choose to sin, (and every conscious human being has made that choice: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." [Romans 3:23]) we place ourselves under the judgment of God's unswerving justice. God's justice in regard to sin is simple: "The soul who sins is the one who will die." (Ezekiel

18:20a). As difficult as it may seem to believe, the smallest infraction of God's law is a capital offense, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." (James 2:10)!

Many people mistakenly think that God is an enemy to be satisfied. They believe that failure to "make him happy", or "do what he wants" will land them an eternal prison sentence. Even more interesting is the fact that most people think that they are "o.k. with God", and that they have no

reason to fear eternity. Well, of these misconceptions we must set the record straight. First, God is not our enemy - sin, and the death it brings, are the enemies. As a matter of fact, it is God himself who has mounted the rescue effort to save our souls! It was he who sent his Son Jesus to take the punishment that we deserve so that we might be freed from the consequences of our own actions. Second, as previously stated, we all have a personal sin problem. If we fail to deal with it squarely, we will most certainly be condemned

to an eternity of unending punishment. The only prescription for our problem is that of a personal relationship with the One God has proclaimed to be our Savior- Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus himself said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6).

So, just how does one enter into a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ? To begin with, we must unequivocally state that the process is not a matter for debate. There are only two positions anyone may take in answer to this question. The first position is *subjective*. It states that a person's approach to this all-important relationship is a matter of personal determination. Whatever one "thinks" or "feels" the appropriate approach to be, is the one that is 'right' for that individual. The second position is *objective*. It declares that only the Word of God can point us to a saving relationship with Christ. It seeks the clear direction of God's Word and rejects all human notions of alternative paths. Of the two positions, this brief discussion on God's plan for mankind's salvation is built upon the latter. A subjective salvation is one that is built on shifting sand. As the Scripture boldly declares: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12).

Let's set aside all preconceptions about salvation and allow the Word of God to direct our understanding. If we find ourselves challenged by a statement of Scripture, it becomes our personal responsibility to act upon it. By responding in a positive manner to each of Scripture's demands, we will find ourselves walking a path that leads to eternal life with God.

## Faith

The first step one must take in order to enter into a saving relationship with Christ is to approach God in faith. Scripture speaks of this foundational concept when it says: "...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6). Faith, as a means of approach to God, is consistently found throughout Scripture. In the days of Adam and Eve, their son Abel was declared a "righteous man" when he offered his sacrifice by faith (Genesis 4:2; Hebrews 11:4). In the case of Abraham (a man who lived before the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai), it is said that: (he) believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6). As a matter of fact, the entire eleventh chapter of the New Testament Book of Hebrews speaks of those who approached God on the basis of faith. As they once did, we must do now.

It is important, however, to understand that our faith is to be focused. Those who lived and died before the advent of Christ had a different faith focus than that which we have been given today. The focus of our faith must be directed at Christ. The Apostle Peter declares this principle when he says (speaking of Jesus): "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

What is it, then, that we must believe about Christ? For anyone to understand the person of Jesus Christ, they must acknowledge his four basic qualities.

The first of these is the fact that Jesus is God. In John 1:1 we find this clear statement: "In the beginning was the Word, and the

Word was with God, and the Word was God." Continuing on in the same chapter, we find this statement in verse 14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The second quality of Christ is found in the fact that he is the Creator. In writing to the Colossians, Paul states of Jesus: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." (Colossians 1:16).

In the verse immediately following, Paul mentions the third quality of Christ, naming him the Sustainer of "all things" (Colossians 1:17). Given this awesome reality, it is little wonder that at his death on the cross, the Creation went into convulsions (Matthew 27:51-53)!

The fourth quality of Christ mentioned by Paul is that of Savior (Colossians 1:20). It is this last quality that is of immediate importance to all who seek salvation from sin.

Christian faith is that which understands Jesus to be God the Creator, Sustainer and Savior of life. It is a deeply held conviction that moves the believer to actively receive salvation from God. ***Who do you believe Jesus to be?***

## Repentance

The first act prompted by Christian faith is that of repentance. It is the same action called for by the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost that followed the resurrection of Christ. On that day, in the city of Jerusalem, Peter stood before a gathered multitude and proclaimed Jesus as God's Mes-

siah. Having been convinced of the reality of this fact, the assembled crowd inquired of the Apostles: "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter's first direction to this crowd of believers was "repent" (Acts 2:38).

"Repentance" is the word we give to the one found in the Greek New Testament: "metanoeo". This Greek word is really a compound word made up of "change" (meta) and "thinking" (noeo). Given this information, it is easy for us to see that the concept of repentance is "a change in thinking".

Repentance is a change of thinking that is revealed in a change of conduct. This is the clear lesson we learn from John the Baptist's wilderness ministry. In confronting the Pharisees and Sadducees that were coming to him for baptism, John challenged them to genuine repentance by issuing a call to: "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." (Matthew 3:8).

The best way for us to understand repentance in our own lives is to think of it as a 180° change in our thinking and actions toward God. Repentance demands that we give up our attitude of disobedience toward God and replace it with a willingness to do his bidding. Repentance demands that we begin doing the things God has called us to do.

The importance of repentance in our approach to God cannot be overstated. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." was the central theme of John's ministry in preparing people for the ministry of Christ (Matthew 3:2). It was also the theme of Jesus' own preaching (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15). And it was the theme of the Apostles' preaching as well (Mark 6:12). Jesus himself warned the crowds of the dangers of failing to repent when he said: "...unless

you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:3&5).

It is impossible for anyone to come to Christ unless they have been moved by faith to turn from their sin. Coming to Christ for salvation demands that we turn away from the very things that have brought us death. Not only are we to foreswear our participation in sin, but we are to have a changed attitude toward it as well.

What is your attitude toward sin? Have you come to the point that you are ready to renounce your allegiance to a life of self-gratification? Both you and God know what must change if you have yet to follow him with an undivided heart.

### **Baptism**

Having changed *our mind* in regard to our participation in a life of sin, we stand ready for God to change his mind regarding our participation in sin. God's change of mind regarding our sin takes place when we meet the blood sacrifice of Christ in the waters of Christian baptism.

Baptism isn't for everybody! If a person has yet to come to faith in the person of Jesus Christ, baptism is not appropriate. If a person has come to such faith, but has yet to turn from their sin, baptism is not appropriate. However, IF a person has come to faith in Christ, and IF a person has turned from sin-- then baptism is appropriate!

Many excellent examples of this are seen in the New Testament book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost that immediately followed Jesus resurrection, God established his Church. This event took place as the Apostles, along with a multitude of Jews, were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast. As the Holy Spirit took the

visible form of tongues of flame descending upon the Apostles, they began to preach of the glories of God and his Son Jesus (Acts 2:3). It was at this very point that Peter proclaimed the Gospel to the assembled crowd, resulting in their deep conviction of the fact that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah! Luke records their reaction: "... they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37). As we have already seen, Peter's first direction to the multitude was "repent"; however, he continued by saying "and be baptized". This second direction made perfect sense, for Jesus himself had directed his disciples, just prior to his ascension: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (Matthew 28:19). Not only did Peter provide the clear direction that they receive baptism, but he also stated the reason for it when he said: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:38). Here Peter clearly declares that Christian baptism (immersion into water that is preceded by faith in Christ and repentance of sin) affects the forgiveness of sin and the reception of the indwelling Spirit of God. Not only that, Peter goes on to say that this invitation to salvation was "for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:39). The great thing about this clear statement is the confidence that it brings us in knowing that we may come to salvation in Christ just as these first converts did on the Day of Pentecost!

As the book of Acts unfolds, we see this continued pattern repeated time and again. In

Acts Chapter 8, we find Philip sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with a man from Ethiopia. Upon his understanding the message, he immediately asks Philip "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). In Acts chapter 9, we find the conversion account of Saul of Tarsus (later to be known as the Apostle Paul). Having been confronted by Christ in a vision while traveling to the city of Damascus (for the purpose of persecuting Christians), Saul is led into the city (having been blinded by his experience) where a man by the name of Ananias presents him with the Gospel message and gives him the exhortation: "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." (Acts 22:16). This pattern of baptism preceded by faith and repentance is also seen in the conversions of Lydia and the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16), and the people of Corinth (Acts 18).

In addition to the examples given in the Book of Acts, we find the clear teaching of the Apostles on the subject of baptism in their letters to the early churches. Paul tells the Romans that baptism is a participation in the death of Christ (Romans 6:3). He tells the Galatians that, in their baptism, they have been "clothed" with Christ

(Galatians 3:27). To the Colossians, Paul states that baptism is a "circumcision" (cutting away) of the sinful nature (Colossians 2:10-13). In Peter's first letter, we find this clear statement concerning the instrumentality of baptism in the salvation process: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes *baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...*" (1 Peter 3:18-21).

The physical waters of baptism have no magical curative power. The power of baptism to cleanse us from sin and imbue us with the indwelling Holy Spirit comes through the promise of God and the power of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. It is the point at which we receive personal benefit from the blood sacrifice of Christ.

### **Faithfulness**

Having been united with Christ through faith, repentance and Christian baptism, we are called to live lives of faithfulness to God. This involves fellowship with God and his people through worship, education and service. The local congregation of believers is God's primary outlet for these activities. In the church we find nurture, accountability, and exhortation to walk the path of Christian faithfulness. Jesus himself said: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." (John 8:31b).

**Where Are You?** Have you come to faith in the person of Jesus Christ? Have you turned from sin, vowing to live for God and follow him alone? Have you been cleansed of your sin through Christian baptism, receiving the indwelling Spirit of God in your life? If you are deficient in any of these areas, will you allow God's Word to lead you in your acceptance of the Gift he freely offers? The choice is up to you.