

Foundations Lesson #3

Salvation, Part 1

Our outline reads: Every human being falls into one of two categories: **having** a right relationship with God, or **not having** a right relationship with God. There's no gray area or middle ground when it comes to God's salvation. Below are some names and phrases that the Bible uses to describe these two positions before God.

When we see humans, perhaps in a store or on a sidewalk, we may notice whether they're male or female, how tall or short they are, how slim or how heavy. But when God looks at us, his primary concern isn't with our physical characteristics. He's much more concerned about **relational** matters. His number one concern as he views each individual person he's created is whether or not that one precious human being **has** a right relationship with him by their sins being forgiven, or whether that individual **doesn't have** a right relationship with him, because their sins are still being credited against them. Whether we realize it or not, this relational issue, as God sees people, is **infinitely** more important than what **we** notice when we view fellow humans. It makes all the difference in the world, both in this life and in the life to come. Just because we can't tell what someone's relationship to God is with our physical eyes, doesn't mean that it's not of the greatest importance.

The Bible tells us that this right relationship with God, this salvation provided by the Lord, can only come through the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Jn. 5:23b He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

1Jn. 2:23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

Jn. 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Some philosophers have sneered at God's salvation, calling it too narrow, because it's only available through Jesus Christ. But God's salvation is open to all. As it is written, "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21). I invite you to consider this issue from God's perspective. He's created everything seen and unseen. Knowing man's desperate need and out of his great love, he's sent his own Son into the world. Through unspeakably great pain and suffering, the very Son of God has laid down his life so that we could have our sins forgiven and have a right relationship with the Father. This is the only provision God has made for us to receive his salvation. Should God then say that it's also O.K. for people to enjoy his salvation based on their own man-made religions? ...that their contrived systems are somehow equal in power to the very sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ? I think we can all see how ridiculous that would be. John 14:6 puts it this way:

Jn. 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Perhaps you've heard the saying that "many roads lead to God." I find it significant that when Jesus here declares that he is **the way**, the original Greek word for "way" could also be translated as "path" or "road". So Jesus has made it very clear that he's the only road to God; he is **the way**, **the truth**, and **the life**; no one comes to the Father except through him. God's salvation is available to all, but anyone who wants to receive it must go through Jesus Christ. He is God's only provision to be saved. As it is written, "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).

We also need to understand that there's a night-and-day difference between having received God's salvation and not having received God's salvation. The contrast between the black section of the outline and the white section to its right tries to present that truth visually. Scripture puts it this way:

2Co. 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

On our outline, we see that the Bible uses a variety of terms to describe God's salvation. The word *Christian*, meaning one belonging to Christ, is fairly commonly employed in the church today, but it only appears three times in the Bible. Let me read you those three passages.

Ac. 26:28-29 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

Paul replied, "Short time or long – I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

1Pt. 4:16-17 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Ac. 11:26 ...The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

As we can see from this last verse, the main word used by the early church to describe a follower of Jesus was simply the word *disciple*, which means learner, pupil, or student. The next term listed on our outline is *saved*, which emphasizes God's role as Savior as well as our need of being rescued.

1Co. 1:21 ...God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Ac. 16:31 They [Paul and Silas] replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household."

Ro. 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

What do we need to be saved from? Certainly from sin, but also from selfishness, from the evil influences of the world, from the devil, from eternal damnation and more. Then the term *born again* emphasizes the truth that God's salvation is the wonderful beginning of a new life.

1Pt. 1:23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Jn. 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

Jn. 3:7 [Jesus speaking to Nicodemus] You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

Perhaps someone has told you that all people are God's children. That's incorrect. We're all God's creation, and we're all children of Adam and Eve, but in order to become a child of the Most High God, faith in Jesus Christ is required.

Jn. 1:12-13 Yet to all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Ro. 8:16-17 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we [believers] are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Heb. 12:5-7a And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.

Scripture also reveals that the eternal destination of those who've accepted God's salvation will be completely different from those who haven't. That truth will be covered in far greater detail in Lesson #15 on Eternal Judgment, but for now I'd just like to read you two passages of Scripture that describe the eternal destination of those who've embraced God's salvation.

Jn. 14:2-3 [Jesus speaking to his followers] In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

2Co. 5:1-5 [the apostle Paul writing to believers] ¹Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

⁴For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

It's interesting to note that in the late 1990s about 87% of Americans believed they were going to heaven, but only about 27% of Americans were trusting Jesus for salvation. By doing simple math, we can calculate that therefore about 60% of Americans were deceived. We all need to be very careful not to take our wishful thinking and adopt it as though it were reality.

Forgiveness is covered in Lesson #17, but again it's also an important element of God's salvation.

Ro. 4:4-8 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

Eph. 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Another component of God's salvation is that those receiving it are also declared righteous.

Ro. 10:4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

2Co. 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Then the word *redeemed* means: delivered from some form of bondage on the basis of the price paid by a redeemer. So if you sold your watch to a pawn shop and then redeemed it, that would mean that you bought it back.

1Pt. 1:18-19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Tit. 2:13-14 ...Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

The next term on our list, *justified*, is a forensic term meaning to be declared innocent or to have a favorable verdict announced.

Ro. 4:5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Gal. 2:16a Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Ac. 13:39 Through him [Jesus] everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

Then we also see that for those who receive God's salvation, their citizenship is affected. No longer are they citizens of the kingdom of darkness, but they've now become citizens of the kingdom of light.

Col. 1:12-13 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

Eph. 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

Jn. 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The next entry on our outline describes those who've received God's salvation as having eternal life.

Jn. 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jn. 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Jn. 5:24 [Jesus speaking] "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

I'd like to point out that there's an aspect of this eternal life which will be inherited. In other words, we believers will receive it after we leave the body, in the age to come (Lk. 18:30). But, there's also an aspect of this eternal life that we receive the moment we accept Jesus Christ into our lives. As we just read, whoever hears Jesus' word and believes God **has** eternal life; he **has** crossed over from death to life. As I John 5:11 says, God **has given** us eternal life. There's a degree to which we believers get to enjoy this eternal life every day we live on earth. So let's appreciate God's provision and live in the fullness of what he's provided!

Those who've received God's salvation live in two spheres simultaneously. Yes, we're citizens of the Kingdom of God, which belongs to the realm of the spirit. It's unseen. But we also, for now, have physical bodies, so we still function in this physical world. Scripture would tell us that we're **in** the world but not **of** it. Being **of** the world is a description that identifies unbelievers. We believers are **in Christ**.

2Co. 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

1Co. 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

Eph 1:13a And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

I invite you to meditate further on these descriptions that God's provided for us in his word of the salvation he's so richly poured out on those who believe. Each description carries meaning and insight that helps us understand how blessed we are to have God's salvation. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #3

Salvation, Part 2

Going on to the second page of our outline, Roman Numeral number one gives us a presentation of the message of salvation. Before considering the particulars of that message, we need to grasp the heart of God. God, for whatever his various reasons were, has chosen to create everything that exists. That alone is a stunning revelation of his nature. Then as the *piece de resistance* of everything he'd already so skillfully and masterfully formed and fashioned, he created human beings, and he gave them the honor and dignity of being made in his own image and likeness. Perhaps the single most amazing quality that he invested into these humans was the ability to make their own choices, to exercise their own **will**. Clearly, God is **not** a control freak. If he were, he would've made sure that they were only able to do what he wanted them to do. That would have saved him a great deal of pain and heartache. God understood perfectly that if he gave the humans he created the capacity to assert their own independent will, that they'd end up doing things that he didn't want them to be doing, but that didn't stop him from graciously giving them their own free will anyway. On top of all that, he still gave them the ability to reproduce, essentially guaranteeing that the rebellion these creatures were capable of would continue on for many, many generations to come.

Not long after they'd been created, the man and the woman chose to disobey God. Although God knew this would happen – he knows all things – God had a great longing, an aching, an intense yearning to make sure there was a solution for the trouble the humans had gotten themselves into. This passionate desire in the heart of **The Almighty** is the reason we even have the doctrine of

salvation today. **God is a great rescuer**, and he goes so far as to take the initiative in rescuing when those in great calamity haven't even asked to be rescued. He doesn't force his salvation on anyone, but at great personal pain and cost he's provided it so that all who choose to want **him** can have it freely, with no strings attached. The heart of God deeply desires for **all** to receive his salvation.

2Pt. 3:9 ...He [the Lord] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

1Ti. 2:3-4 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Every time a sinner drops into hell, it's not because the heart of God has been satisfied, it's because the heart of God has been resisted. What does God **want**? He wants no one to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. What does God **want**? He wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Scripture makes it crystal clear that the heart of God longs for all to experience his salvation.

Having established God's heart, God's desire for all to come to salvation, let's now examine the particulars of the message of that salvation. We first need to understand that the relationship of God to humans is that of the Creator to the created.

Rev. 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Col. 1:16 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.

Ro. 1:18-20 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 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.

Dt. 32:6 Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?

We need to realize, with a thankful heart, that we wouldn't even exist if it weren't for God. We owe God that debt of gratitude. In addition, God's creation testifies powerfully and clearly to us of his eternal power and divine nature, so that we're without excuse. Think of something you made – perhaps an ornament, a chair, a painting, a piece of music, or a poem you wrote. Didn't it somehow reflect your personality? And didn't you have the right to do with it whatever you wanted? God has that right, too.

Fortunately for us, God deeply loves us.

Jn. 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

1Jn. 4:16a And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.
God is love.

1Jn. 3:16a This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

Ro. 5:6-8 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It's incredible to grasp, but the God of the universe loves us so much that he'd rather die than live without us. That's an amazing blessing, but I'd caution you to make sure that you personalize that blessing. What I mean is that some people are ready and willing to accept the truth that God is love, but they don't really believe that God loves **them**. That's a big mistake. God is extraordinarily personal in his dealings with each one of us. God loves **you**. You can believe that truth and live in the benefits that proceed from your faith, or you could let your feelings, your past hurts, or other reasons tell you that God doesn't love you. The choice is yours, but the fact that God loves **you** won't change. Someone could tell you that George Washington was born in 1729. You might believe that he was born in 1740, but none of that changes the fact that George Washington was born on February 22, 1732. In the same way, what you or I believe doesn't change the fact that God loves you and that he loves me. He doesn't love us because of what we've done. He certainly doesn't approve of all the sinful things we've done. But God's love and his approval are two very different things. He loves you because **he is love**, and because he created you in his own image and likeness. I would encourage you to believe that truth wholeheartedly. You can and you need to.

Besides God's love, we also have to consider other aspects of his nature, like his justice, his holiness, and his righteousness.

2Th. 1:6a God is just:

1Pt. 1:15-16 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Ps. 7:11 God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.

There are many, many other Scriptures describing God's justice, his holiness, and his righteousness that could be quoted, but the point is that God is so holy and so pure that he hates sin. Sin repulses him. And in his great justice, he cannot leave sin unpunished. That wouldn't be right, and the Judge of all the earth always does what's right. He's completely righteous.

This leaves us in a great dilemma. Why? Because all of us are sinful by nature. When the first man and woman sinned by disobeying God, their nature, their identity, their spiritual DNA was changed from that of innocence to that of being sinful. Because everything reproduces according to its own kind, all their offspring also have that **sin nature**. When you and I were two years old, our parents didn't have to teach us how to misbehave, we did that just fine on our own. Our sin nature has since then manifested itself hundreds of times in such things as telling lies, lusting, stealing, anger, jealousy, or selfishness, just to name a few. Any honest person will freely admit that they're far from sinless. Scripture also clearly declares the sinfulness of man.

Ro. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Ro. 3:10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;

Ps. 5:4 You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell.

Is. 59:1-2 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Our sin separates us from God. Just like a cesspool cannot clean itself, so we who have a sin nature cannot make ourselves pure and holy. That's impossible. A man from Texas was on his way to visit his son in a motel room when he saw, from the second story balcony, a boy lying motionless at the bottom of the motel swimming pool. Without hesitation, he jumped off the balcony, hurdled the chain-link fence that surrounded the pool, dove into the water, and got the boy out. He then gave the boy mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, got him breathing again, and then gave the boy back to his grateful mother. That boy was completely helpless as he lay at the bottom of that pool. If someone hadn't rescued him, he would have died. That's an accurate picture of our spiritual condition before a holy God. We are hopelessly drowning in our sins, completely incapable of saving ourselves. Without someone rescuing us, we are dead in the water.

When I'd been saved for only a few months, God made this truth real to me in a profound way. I was at church and the service hadn't started yet. A woman named Dixie came over to me and started a conversation. We chatted. Dixie then asked me, "What were you like before you got saved?" I answered her question by describing how I was an atheist. Dixie then looked up at me through her thick glasses and said, "Boy, you were **really lost!**" When I heard that, I was **really offended** 😊. I didn't say it, but I was thinking, "You weren't so found yourself, lady." I was stewing all through the service. When I got back to my college dorm room, I sat in my chair and bowed my head to pray about what had happened, but before I could say a word, God spoke to me and said, "Dixie is right." That changed everything for me. I now tell people that they'll never appreciate the depth, the riches, the glories of the salvation they have in Christ until they first embrace the truth of how hopelessly lost they were before they got saved. Then I put the dumbest look I can on my face, look up at them through my glasses, and tell them that before they received God's salvation they were **really lost!** It may not have quite the same impact as when Dixie did it, but hopefully it still helps.

Since sin is an offense to God's purity and holiness, it carries great consequences.

Ro. 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ez. 18:20a The soul who sins is the one who will die.

We'll be covering the subject of sin much more thoroughly in Lesson #11, but for now it's important for us to recognize that from the very beginning, God has made it clear that sin is rightfully punished by death. Since **all** have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that leaves us all in a most serious predicament. We're like the prisoner awaiting execution for the crimes he's committed.

Yet because of God's goodness, he's provided a way out so that our sins can be forgiven. The rightful punishment that our sins deserved has been paid by another, by Jesus Christ. The justice of **The Almighty** which requires that sin is punished by death has been fully satisfied by Jesus Christ who, being sinless himself, willingly laid down his life **for us**, so that we might be forgiven and have the opportunity to enter into the family of God.

Ro. 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jn. 1:29 The next day John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The Jews who heard John the Baptist declare that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world knew what John was talking about. They were very familiar with lambs that were sacrificed to atone for sins that had been committed. They knew the Law of God required such sacrifices to be made. They may have been puzzled about how a human would take away sin, but they understood that innocent blood had to be shed for sins to be forgiven.

Before going on, I want to point out that the pain and suffering endured by God the Son and even

God the Father in providing salvation for us was far more extreme than we can even imagine or understand. God's salvation is free for us, but it was terribly costly for him. Crucifixion was the most painful, agonizing death ever invented by the twisted minds of depraved men. On top of all that, Jesus was betrayed by a friend, deserted by his followers, viciously accused by the very religious leaders who should have welcomed him, and he had to endure the injustice of a completely unfair trial, being up all night when he certainly could have used a good night's sleep. I invite you to study the sufferings of Christ further on your own. When you do, please remind yourself again and again that every single bit of pain and suffering Jesus endured is a revelation of his boundless love for us; it reveals what he was willing to bear in order to rescue us from the sin that had enslaved us and condemned us. He loved us so much that he saved us when we were incapable of saving ourselves.

Salvation is a great gift that God has provided for mankind, but each human, on their own, has to choose to accept that gift. At Christmastime, gifts that are left under the tree are of no benefit to the intended recipient. The most expensive gift, given to the most needy person, is of no value to that individual unless it's unwrapped and accepted. So also with God's salvation. God has made it available to all, but the painful truth is that not everyone **wants** his salvation. So the all-important question remains, ***What do we need to do to receive God's salvation?***

Our outline tells us that we need to ask for God's forgiveness, believe in Jesus Christ, and commit ourselves to live in such a way as to please ***The Almighty***. It starts with the humility that acknowledges that God is completely holy and pure, yet I have been very sinful. Realizing and accepting that truth, I ask God to forgive me, repenting of my sins.

1Jn. 1:8-9 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Ho. 14:2 Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: "Forgive all our sins...

Ac. 17:30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Even though receiving God's salvation begins with acknowledging the problem, it doesn't end there. We also need to accept and embrace God's solution to the problem of our sin. God has sent his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sin. We need to ***believe*** that, placing our trust and confidence in Jesus and the work he's done on the cross – and nothing else – to bring us into a right standing before God.

Ro. 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Ac. 10:43 All the prophets testify about him [Jesus] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Eph. 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

This last Scripture passage says that we're saved by grace through faith. In our church building, the water line enters through a block wall in the basement. Right after it enters, there's a screw-type valve, followed by the water meter, followed by a ball valve. Both the screw valve and the ball valve must be open for the water to flow into the building. Similarly, both the grace valve and the faith valve must be open for the water of eternal life to flow into the heart of a human. Without God's grace it's impossible to be saved, but without faith no one will be saved either.

It's important to understand this. Over, and over, and over again God takes the initiative in

reaching out to us humans. Then, our response to his initiative determines our destiny. When Jesus said, "Follow me" to Peter, or Andrew, or Matthew, he was taking the initiative in reaching out to them. That was an act of God's grace. Fortunately, they each responded well. They combined the words they heard with faith, so they left everything and followed Jesus. Both the grace valve and the faith valve were open.

In the same way, we can – and we need to – thank God for saving us. Why? Because it would have been impossible for us to have eternal life unless God had made sure the grace valve was open. But we can also mourn over the many people who've responded to God's initiative by saying, "No, thank-you." That's what they've decided to do with the faith valve. Hopefully, they'll change their mind before it's too late.

Some in the church may emphasize one or the other of these factors in receiving God's salvation. For example, I have friends who love to emphasize the truth that we're God's elect because he's chosen us (1 Peter 1:1-2), that no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him (John 6:44), and that God is Sovereign over the affairs of men (Daniel 4:32). These things are true and Biblical. Yet I have other friends who love to emphasize the truth that people need to "choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15), and that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21). This emphasis is equally true and Biblical. But we have to understand that it's not a matter of *either or*; it's a matter of *both and*. There's a part that belongs to God *and* there's a part that belongs to us. We cannot do God's part and he will not do our part. Both God's grace and our faith are necessary in order for God's salvation to be received.

Also, I'd like to point out that this faith has to be personal. It's possible for someone to believe that Jesus died for the sins of the world, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven where he's seated at the right hand of the Father. Yet that doesn't guarantee that they've received God's salvation at all, because receiving his salvation is more than just believing facts. It's making those facts personal. King David wrote, "The LORD is *my* shepherd." Perhaps you've seen children playing and one child grabs a toy away from another child saying, "That's *my* toy." In the same way, we enter into God's salvation by believing that Jesus is *my* Savior. He's certainly also the Savior of the world, but I've made his work personal. I receive him into *my* heart. As it is written, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17).

Then also, we **surrender our will** to God. Put another way, we commit ourselves henceforth to live in such a way as to please the Lord rather than ourselves. When we receive God's salvation, a great exchange takes place: we give him our sin and he imparts his righteousness to us; we give him our life and he imparts his life to us. That means the attitudes I have, the thoughts I think, the choices and decisions I make from now on are not governed by what I want, but rather by what God wants. The Bible refers to this practice as our submitting to his "Lordship." Choosing to make Jesus Christ **Lord** of our lives means that he's our king, our master. We follow and obey him. The good news is that he'll do a far, far better job of running our lives than what we'd do if we were running our own lives. He's much, much wiser than we are, and he loves us so much that everything he says for us to do (or not do) is only in our own best interests. ***The wisest decision you'll ever make is to submit yourself to the Lordship of Christ.*** Nothing could be better than that.

The Bible has much to say about our need to please the Lord in everything.

2Co. 5:8-9 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

1Th. 2:4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

1Jn. 3:22 ...and receive from him [God] anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

If you've never received God's salvation but you're ready to do so, I invite you to pray a simple prayer with me. Ready? *“Dear Lord, I know that I'm a sinner and that I need your forgiveness. I believe that Christ died in my place to pay the penalty for my sin and that he rose from the dead. I now invite Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Savior and my Lord. Thank you for making me your child. Help me learn to please you in every part of my life. Amen.”* If you've just prayed that prayer sincerely, God has heard you and imparted his salvation into your life. You are now a child of **The Almighty**. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #3

Salvation, Part 3

Roman Numeral number two on our outline examines the great security in and the great assurance of God's salvation. God has committed himself to shield his sons and daughters from every conceivable external force that would attempt to separate them from his salvation.

Jn. 10:27-29 [Jesus speaking] My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

I want you to understand, no murderer, no court of law, no demon in hell, nor anything else in all creation is able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. God knows how to protect his own. If you're a Christian today, you are **safe** in Jesus' hand. No one can snatch you out of it. You are **safe** in the Father's hand. No one can snatch you out of it. No one is powerful enough to mess with God!

Having said that, the question arises, *Is it possible for me to jump out of the Father's hand?* In other words, *Will he force me to stay even if I were to choose to renounce Christ?* That's a very serious question. We've already discovered that God has given us humans a free will. We have the capacity to make our own choices and decisions, even if they don't please **The Almighty**. So the same question could be worded differently by asking, *Has God taken away our free will when it comes to the issue of walking away from his salvation?* After all, if God were to allow us to have free will in this area, it's just a matter of time until someone exercises that free will and walks out of the Father's hand. So the question remains, *Is it possible for us believers to do that?*

The answer is yes, it is possible. God has **not** taken our free will away from us in this matter.

2Ti. 2:12 ...If we disown him, he will also disown us;

Jn. 15:1-6 [Jesus speaking] “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

No one can argue that the main point of this parable is that we believers are being commanded

and exhorted to **remain in Christ**. Five times in these six verses, in one way or another, Jesus has exhorted his followers to remain in him. There'd be absolutely no point in his saying that if it were impossible for his followers to leave him. The Lord has told us here to **choose** to remain in him. Graciously, Jesus even lets us know what the dire consequences are for **choosing** not to remain in him. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. I've heard one preacher say that if you are bound and determined to turn your back on Christ, God will allow you to walk away only if you can't be persuaded to stay.

Then, Hebrews 10:26-31 has this to say,

Heb. 10:26-31 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Both on our outline and in the Scriptures and Quotes document, there are other passages from Revelation and Mark that also speak to this issue. I'll let you read them at your convenience. For now, I'd like to quote from an official document of a denomination that's addressed this issue using very clear and succinct language. They have written, and I quote:

QUOTE "In view of the biblical teaching that the security of the believer depends on a living relationship with Christ (John 15:6); in view of the Bible's call to a life of holiness (I Peter 1:16; Hebrews 12:14); in view of the clear teaching that a man may have his part taken out of the Book of Life (Revelation 22:19); and in view of the fact that one who believes for a while can fall away (Luke 8:13); [we] disapprove of the unconditional security position which holds that it is impossible for a person once saved to be lost."

Having said that, I'd like to emphasize that we should not live in fear over this issue. Why? Because God has tremendous and awesome keeping power. If you want to be kept, he'll keep you! As a very young believer, I was deeply impressed by the Scriptures that illustrated the faith of some ending up in shipwreck. Saul started strong but ended up a total mess. David loved God yet he fell into committing murder and adultery. Judas left his former life to follow Jesus, yet he betrayed the Lord and committed suicide. I was deeply troubled by the thought, "How can I make it to the end?" I rightly understood that I was no better than they were, but I sure didn't want to end up like they did or worse. Then one day when I was reading the book of Jude, the following verse jumped off the page at me:

Jde. 24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy –

When I read that, I wanted to shout at the top of my lungs, "That's it!!" All I needed to do was to have confidence in God's great keeping power. He **is** able to keep every one of us from falling. Don't trust in your own ability to make it to the end. That's a fool's game. Trust God! **He** is able to keep you from falling. You don't need to live in fear, and God doesn't want you to live in fear.

Ro. 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba*, Father."

Ps. 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the

stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?

Another obstacle that most newly saved people encounter is that of doubt. Many young believers wonder, “Am I really saved? What if I didn't pray the right thing when I asked Jesus to come into my life?” These questions, or similar ones, bother them. If you've recently come into the Kingdom of God, I understand that you may not feel sure of yourself because your belief in Christ is so new. You're not accustomed to living by faith yet. But take heart, God is really good at taking great care of spiritual infants. When you prayed to receive Christ, God saw and understood your heart. If you didn't use quite the right words, God knew exactly what you **meant**. And he's provided you with a powerful piece of spiritual armor that will help you: the shield of **faith** with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one (see Ephesians 6:16). The flaming arrows of doubt don't have to plague you. You have the shield of faith at your disposal.

1 Jn. 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

When you ask some people if they've received God's salvation, they might say, “I hope so,” or “I'm trying.” The verse we just read clearly states that we can **know** that we have eternal life. It's not a matter of hoping or trying. It's a matter of believing and receiving.

Jn. 1:12 Yet to all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God –

2Co. 1:21a Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.

If you're still wondering whether or not you've really received God's salvation, I encourage you to go back over Roman Numeral number one on our outline. If you've done what God requires in order to be saved, **you have eternal life**, because God is always true to his word. He is **faithful** to all generations. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #3

Salvation, Part 4

Roman Numeral number three on our outline deals with the use of the word “salvation” in the Scripture. So far in this lesson, I've used the word salvation to refer to someone entering the family of God by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Of course, the Bible does use the word salvation that way – referring to a past act by which a believer has been saved from the penalty of sin. But additionally, the Bible uses the word salvation to mean a present outworking by which a believer is being saved from the power of sin, and also a future hope when a believer will be saved from the presence of sin. So that no one gets confused when they come across these occurrences of the word salvation in their daily Bible reading, I'd like to point some of them out to you. As we've already seen, the word “salvation” can refer to what happens when we accept Christ into our lives.

Mk. 16:15-16 He [Jesus] said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Ac. 16:30-31

He brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household."

So if you're a Christian today, you've already received God's salvation. But, you're also being saved, being transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ. The outworking of your salvation is taking place daily as God continues to set you free from sinful thoughts, habits, and desires.

1Co. 1:18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

2Co. 2:15

For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

1Pt. 1:9

for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Pp. 2:12

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

So if you're a Christian today, the Bible declares that you're being saved, that God is continuing to rescue you from the fear, the anger, the pride, the rebellion, the bitterness, the lust, and the other sinful tendencies we all battle. But there's also a future salvation that you can look forward to!

1Pt. 1:5

who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Ro. 13:11

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Heb. 9:28

so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Ro. 5:9

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

So if you're a Christian today, you can and you need to look forward to that glorious day after your life in this physical body is over, when Jesus' work on the cross will be applied to your life so fully that the very sin nature you inherited from Adam and Eve will be removed from you. I, for one, am **greatly** looking forward to receiving God's salvation in that aspect. It should make me a whole lot easier to live with, too ☺!

Before closing this lesson on salvation, I want to share the following testimony.

STORY

What happens to someone who searches for truth, never hears about Christ, and then dies? Ever asked that question? Here is a true story from Iran which sheds some light on this question.

There was a man living in Tehran who always wanted to find the truth. He never had any contact with committed Christians. He never heard the gospel.

Old age approached and he had a very serious stroke. He was rushed to the hospital and was semi-conscious for three days. His family were by his bedside most of the time – and his son was there day and night. The son longed for his father to say a few words.

The father never spoke, and after three days he died.

A few days later the son had a vivid dream. His father came to him and spoke about those last days in the hospital. "When I was in the hospital I saw Jesus. He told me that He was the one I'd always been looking for. He told me He was the truth, and the only way to meet God was to believe in Him." So there, semi-conscious, this old man became a believer: Jesus didn't let him enter eternity alone.

In the dream, the father went on to apologize to his son for not talking to him. He said, "But for those three days, I was all the time with Jesus – that's why I couldn't talk to you." The father's final words were, "Go and tell all the family about Jesus."

The next morning the son was very excited, but very nervous. What would the rest of the family say if he asked them to believe in Christ? With apprehension he sat down at the breakfast table. He noticed his younger sister wasn't there. When he asked where she was, they said she was upset.

So he went to get her. She was sitting on her bed, knees up, head down, and crying. He sat down and gently took her hand – "What's the matter?" he asked. "I've had a dream, but you'll be upset..." She looked at her brother, a little frightened.

"Don't worry, I won't get angry," he replied. So she told him her story. They had both had the same dream! All thirteen members of this family are now believers.

Please don't use this story as an excuse to become lazy in sharing the message of salvation with those who need to hear it. We have a responsibility to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. We'll learn more about that in Lesson #7. But let's also remember that God has ways of communicating with people and drawing people to himself that are even beyond our imagination. He is God. Nothing is impossible with him. Nothing. Amen. God bless you all.