

Salvation – The Work of Christ

“Salvation is from the Lord.” -- Jonah 2:9.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 6:23.

John Stott calls Christianity “a rescue religion.” Where all other religions focus on man seeking God, Christianity is the story of God reaching out to man through Jesus Christ. Salvation can be defined as the rescue of persons caught in a hopeless situation. Our situation is hopeless, as we stand condemned before God by our sin and there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Only God can save us, and this is why Christ died for us. (1 Timothy 1:15, 1 Thess. 1:10)

A. Old Testament Sacrifices

Old Testament religious practices were sacrificial from the very beginning. The sacrificial system was codified in the Mosaic laws, and this system continued up to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. The OT developed the concept of a “sin-bearer”, which normally would involve the guilty party bearing the consequences for his own offenses (Leviticus 5:17). However, in some cases the consequences are borne by someone other than the offender (Lamentations 5:7).

“This possibility of somebody else accepting the responsibility for, and bearing the consequences of, our sins was further taught by those Old Testament blood sacrifices in the Mosaic legislation which seem so strange to us today. Of the sin offering it was said that God had given it to ‘bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord’ [Lev. 10:17]. Similarly, on the annual Day of Atonement, Aaron was instructed to lay his hands on the head of the scapegoat, thus identifying himself and his people with it; he was then to confess the nation’s sins, symbolically transferring them to the goat, which was driven out into the wilderness; and next we read, ‘The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land’ [Lev. 16:22]. It is plain from this that to ‘bear’ somebody else’s sin is to become his substitute, to bear the penalty of sin in his place.” – from *Basic Christianity*, by John Stott, pp. 90-91.

B. Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross

At the outset of His ministry, Jesus was identified by John the Baptist as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Christ’s sacrifice was prophesied in detail in Isaiah 53. Jesus himself repeatedly foretold his sufferings and death (e.g., Luke 18:31-33). The old sacrifices of bulls and goats could not provide lasting atonement for sin; Christ’s perfect life and sacrificial death is the ultimate sacrifice that never needs repeating – He died once for all (Hebrews 10:4, 10-12).

Christ died in our place – the only perfect person who ever lived died willingly, taking on the penalty of our sin and paying the debt we owed (1 Peter 2:22-24, 1 John 3:5).

Several different terms are used in the New Testament to describe the effect of Christ's work on the cross.

Propitiation – a “covering” of our sins by Christ's work; the appeasement of God's wrath (1 John 2:2, Romans 3:25). This includes the concept of *atonement* – a satisfaction rendered for wrongdoing; an action by which two conflicting parts are made “at one” or the state in which their oneness is enjoyed and expressed.

Redemption – the “price” has been paid to secure our release from sin (Colossians 1:13-14, 1 Timothy 2:6). Jesus himself said that he came “to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). An analogy would be a judge passing sentence against you for breaking the law and charging you a huge fine, then paying the fine for you.

The concept of ransom also involves purchasing the freedom of a slave. As a result of our redemption, we have new *freedom* in Christ – we are free from sin and death (Romans 8:2-4, Acts 13:39). Where before we had been enslaved by Satan, we now are freed from such bondage through Christ (Hebrews 2:14-15, Romans 8:15).

Justification – To justify is to declare one righteous. It is a judicial term indicating that a verdict of acquittal has been made, thereby eliminating any possibility of condemnation or punishment. Justification is always accomplished on a just basis, namely, that the claims of God's law against the sinner have been fully satisfied. We are not justified because of any overlooking, suspending or altering of God's righteous demands, but rather because all those demands or debt obligations were fulfilled in Christ. (Galatians 2:16, Romans 3:22-30, 4:24-25, 5:1 & 9, 8:33, Colossians 2:13-14)

Reconciliation – our alienation from God is removed through Christ's bearing the consequences of our sin (2 Cor. 5:18-21, Col. 1:19-22, Rom. 5:10-11). At the moment of Jesus' death the temple curtain was torn apart, eliminating the barrier between us and God (Matt. 27:51). We now have direct access to God through Christ (Heb. 4:16).

C. Our Adoption as God's Children

Through Christ, we become members of God's family, with all the rights and privileges of natural-born children (John 1:12, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:5-7, 1 John 3:1-2, 10). The legal status of an adopted child was actually superior to that of a natural child in the first century – a natural child could be disowned; an adopted child could not.

D. Grace replaces the Law

As a result of Christ's death, we are now under Grace, not the Mosaic Law – the law could only condemn us, whereas by grace we are saved through faith in Christ who is the only One who could fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17; see also Ephesians 2:8-9, Galatians 3:24, Romans 8:1-4).

E. Salvation is universally offered, individually accepted

Everyone matters to God (Matt. 10:29-31). Salvation is offered to all, and it is God's desire that all be saved (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9). However, God has given us free will, which means God will not force salvation on any who reject it. We must actively respond to God's offer in order to be saved:

- Belief is mandatory, and eternal life the result: John 3:16, Acts 16:30-31, John 6:29, 40
- Repentance is expected: Mark 1:15, Luke 5:32, 13:3
- Baptism is a public acknowledgement of the belief: Matt. 28:19, Acts 2:38 (Christians hold differing views on whether baptism is a requisite for salvation, but the majority view seems to be that an unbaptized believer is still saved.)

Salvation is the result of God's initiative, not anything we do. We cannot earn our salvation by good works; we can only accept or reject God's offer of salvation through faith in Christ. Without Jesus, there is no salvation (Acts 4:12). However, good works are the natural byproduct of our salvation (James 2:18).

F. Salvation is Past, Present & Future

Salvation involves forgiveness of sins (all sins -- past, present and future) and the promise of eternal life in the presence of God rather than eternal separation from God. God's plan is reconcile us to Himself, and progressively to liberate us from our self-centeredness and reconcile us with each other as well.

The Bible tells us: *We have been saved* (our accomplished justification)
 We are being saved (our ongoing sanctification)
 We shall be saved (our future glorification)

As a result of salvation, those who believe in Christ are:

- qualified to share in the inheritance of saints (Col. 1:12)
- made the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- made members of God's household (Ephesians 2:19)
- made citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20)
- made a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)
- made complete in Christ (Col. 2:10)
- delivered from the power of darkness (Col. 1:13)

Recommended reading:

The Liberation of Planet Earth, by Hal Lindsey