

## True Salvation in Christ Jesus

It is not often a good idea to introduce a topic with negatives, but I think an exception is warranted in this case because there is much confusion about what it means to be saved or to become a Christian.

The label applied to the teachings that confuse people about salvation and being a true Christian can be called “easy believe-ism.” There are those that teach and believe that being a Christian is easy; easy in the sense that one can casually “commit” to Jesus like you might join the NRA or a local gym and then not give it much thought thereafter and keep living your life as you always have. The Lord Jesus calls you and me to something much deeper and richer than that. Sadly, some believe it is simple to become a Christian; simple in the sense that all that is needed is to believe facts about Jesus and then live as you please while you wait to die and go to Heaven. This is not the faith leading to salvation that Jesus or the apostles taught. (Facts about Jesus include his birth, his miracles, his death, his resurrection, etc.)

I will use the word *faith* a lot in this essay. When you see it, you can think *trust* as it helps clarify what is meant. The Bible uses these terms interchangeably to describe the willful action taken to rely/depend upon God’s salvation (meaning His gracious act of redeeming love in the form of Jesus’ sacrificial and substitute suffering and death in your place and mine).

Let me clarify that when a person senses in their heart the need for salvation and the desire to ask Jesus for it, the process IS simple. I trust that will become clear as you keep reading. Living the life Jesus calls his disciples to live is the challenging part. Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase “call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved.” And that IS easy or simple IF you understand all that it means to be saved. Let’s look at Acts 16:29-34.

*The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then 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.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family.*

In response to the jailer’s question, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas answer truthfully and simply, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...” However, if we stop there, we come away with an incomplete picture of how a person is truly saved by the power of God through Christ.

Notice what happens immediately *after* the apostles make that statement to the jailer: Verse 32 says, “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in his house.” The “word of the Lord” the jailer and his family heard was a detailed explanation of what it meant to be saved and to become a Christ-follower.

That’s the goal of this paper; to share with you a detailed explanation of what it means to be saved and become a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ.

I’ve used the word “saved” more than once now. Just in case you’re unfamiliar, let me define it briefly. Simply put, “saved” is the condition of a person that has experienced spiritual salvation. Salvation is what we need because of our sin and what Jesus made possible by dying on the cross at Calvary and shedding His blood. Jesus that He came to seek and save the lost. We are saved when we place our trust in what He did to pay the penalty for our personal sin. You’ll read more about that later. For now, know that Jesus saves FROM God’s coming wrath (on those who reject Jesus), from the power of sin, and from Hell; He saves us FOR His worship, His service, His rewards, and Heaven.

As a young person, I heard a very good illustration of this: Imagine a convicted criminal drowning in a lake in which a large alligator lived. The person could not swim so he/she is at risk of death by both drowning and by the alligator. A boat appears and its owner sees the drowning person but also notices the alligator bearing down on him/her. The owner throws the life ring to the criminal and then jumps in the water between him/her and the alligator. The criminal is pulled to the safety of the boat, but the owner is killed by the alligator.

The criminal was saved from both the alligator and from drowning. He/she was also saved for something, not just to be dropped off on the shore and left to live as he/she pleased. He/she was saved in order to warn others of the dangers of the lake while knowing the joy of being rescued from the same.

**CRITICAL POINT:** The gospel that Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship. Please be clear on this point: To be a Christian is to be a disciple. They are synonymous. They cannot be separated. Jesus IS Lord (of everything) before becomes your Savior. I stress this because there is a popular ideology in some churches today that a person can be a true Christian by merely making Jesus his/her Savior while choosing not to submit to Him as master or lord of his/her life. A careful reading of Scripture, particularly the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) will show that this is not the case.

It is true that believing (trusting) on Jesus will save you, but you still need the details. Another example may help illustrate what we mean.

If I tell you that I was feeling bad, went to the doctor, and now feel better you understand that it involves certain things. You don't think that just by walking into the doctor's office I was magically cured of my illness and started feeling better. When I say, "I went to the doctor," you and I both understand that I went to his office, got an examination, a diagnosis, and treatment. I probably got a prescription for some medicine, too.

Believing in Jesus for salvation does the same thing; it involves certain things:

- belief in who Jesus is (Son of God) (John 3:16)
- belief in what He did (died on the cross for the remission of sin, rose from the dead to ensure our bodily resurrection) (Hebrews 9:22, Romans 8:11)
- confession and repentance of sin (2 Corinthians 7:10)
- received cleansing and forgiveness for sins (1 John 1:9)
- experienced spiritual rebirth (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- committed to be Christ's obedient disciple (Luke 9:23)

This is what it means to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Reread those six bullet points once more to help you remember them. (I'll refer to them again as "Six Bullets of Belief.")

Let's look at what Jesus had to say about the cost of being a disciple. Luke 14:26-33 has the words of Jesus and shows that He understood the level of commitment He was asking people to make. This passage has two examples of one who carefully considers the costs of certain decisions and actions. He asks, "Who builds a building without first counting the cost?" and "What king goes to war without considering if he can win?"

Jesus clearly and plainly tells us to count the cost of believing in Him (see the Six Bullets of Belief) because He was calling for a full, total commitment from anyone who chose to follow Him.

Jesus was not shy or reserved about asking persons to make a total commitment to Him. In Luke 9:23, He said, ***"If any man would be my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."***

Those who first heard Jesus speak these words were all too familiar with the Roman cross. It was their electric chair only the agony lasted for days not minutes; it was an instrument of painful

death. Imagine their shock at hearing Jesus tell them that if they wanted to be His disciple they would have to bear a cross DAILY!?!?!?

When Jesus said, "...follow me," He was telling His audience that they would be expected to follow His teaching and His example as well as following Him through times of suffering and hardship (for His sake and the sake of the Gospel).

**John 14:15** "If you love me, you will obey what I command."

**John 14:24** "He who does not love me will not obey my teaching."

**Luke 21:17** "Everyone will hate you because of me."

**Luke 6:22** "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you...for the Son of man's sake."

**Matthew 7:21** "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Those are just a few of the verses that explain the commitment Jesus expects of those who ask Him for salvation. Here's some good news: for those that count the cost and chose to believe on Jesus for salvation (see the 6 Bullets of Belief), God gives them the free gift of eternal life or Heaven (Romans 6:23).

### **Confession and Repentance**

Let me comment briefly on these two elements of believing in Jesus for salvation.

Confession is pretty straightforward. It means to admit to someone that you did something. In this case, it means admitting to God that you have sinned and that you are a guilty sinner.

Romans 3:23 says, "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*"

Repentance means a commitment to turn away from your sinful thoughts, words, and deeds and turn toward the righteous and holy life Jesus calls His followers/disciples to live.

You must do both or any commitment you make to Jesus is incomplete. It is possible to confess your sins without repenting of your sins, but you cannot repent without confessing. Acts 20:21 says, "*I have declared to both Jews and Gentiles that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*"

### **Belief and Behavior: The Dynamic Duo for Christians**

It is sad but true that the prevailing view of what passes for saving faith today continues to grow weaker and shallower all the time. Today, anyone who claims to be a Christian by saying he/she has made a profession of faith is presumed to be a disciple of Jesus, whether or not the person's behavior shows any evidence of commitment to Christ. (Jesus said in Luke 3:8, "Produce fruit as

evidence of repentance.” He was telling his disciples to do things that demonstrate outwardly that they had repented of sin and were now obediently following Him.) Amazingly, many believe that by going through the motions of praying a “salvation prayer” (or stating some written creed) and being baptized they have experienced genuine salvation and they are then free to live as they please with the false confidence that, because of that proclamation/declaration, God is obligated to grant them entry into Heaven. No.

Jesus issued a warning in Matthew 7:13-14 when He said, ***“You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many that choose that way. But the gateway to [spiritual and eternal] life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.”***

It is vital that you understand that being saved, becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, becoming a new creature definitely requires a change in your behavior. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says...

*<sup>9</sup> Don’t you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

*“And such WERE some of you...” You used to act like that, but not anymore!*

### **A Serious and Sobering Call to Salvation, Discipleship, and Commitment**

The Lord Jesus calls for disciples (see Matthew 28:19-20). A call to discipleship is a call to follow Him in obedience, not just praying a prayer or “asking Jesus into your heart.” Jesus' good news freed people from the bondage of their sin while it condemned hypocrisy. It was an offer of eternal life and forgiveness for seriously and genuinely repentant sinners. However, it put sinners on notice that they must turn from sin and embrace God's righteousness. Jesus’ words about eternal life were always accompanied by warnings to those tempted to take salvation lightly. He taught that the way is narrow and few find it. He said many who call him Lord will be forbidden from entering the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matthew 7:13-23).

The life of a disciple of Jesus...the Christian life...is challenging, but joyous. It is amazing to know that in His grace, I am forgiven, accepted, and loved. My faults and mistakes are serious, but His forgiveness is stronger than my sins. He blesses obedience and shows me blessings, large and small, every day. The joy I have found in Christ is my hope and strength when things are

rough. I don't depend on circumstances for happiness but on Him and the Holy Spirit. He promises that He will never leave me, fail me, or put more on me that I can handle. Life with Christ and in Christ is an adventure.

Living obediently today is tough, but He promised us all the help we would need if we will trust Him day-by-day. I have often used a piece of string to illustrate time on earth versus eternity. I have someone take the end of the string and walk as far as they can to the back of the room. I then tie a knot in the string. The knot represents our time on earth. The rest of the string represents the *beginning* of eternity with God and Jesus in Heaven.

The Olympian endures much pain and hardship to train for the games. But the gold medal lasts long after the pain subsides. A trainee goes through incredible ordeals to become a Navy Seal, but the rewards endure. So it is with the Christian life.

**Romans 8:18** *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

The glory Paul mentions in this verse is Heaven.

### **Asking God to Save You**

Do you sense in your heart that you want or need to be saved? Is something stirring inside you? If the answer is "yes," then I urge you to go to the Six Bullets of Belief. Reread them then speak them as a prayer to God the Father. Declare the statements with something like "I will..." or "I do..." then ask God in the name of Jesus to save you. He will. He promised.

After you pray that prayer, you should do something things to immediately start developing or growing a Christian:

1. Get a Bible and begin reading it daily. Build up as quickly as you can to 30 minutes a day. Start with the Gospel of John or Romans. Use the oldest translation you can understand with some effort.
2. Spend some time praying. Build up as quickly as you can to 20-30 minutes a day. Use the word ACTS as an acrostic to learn the areas or categories of prayer. They are:
  - A – Adoration (loving, worshipping, and praising God)
  - C – Confession (admitting and asking forgiveness for recent sins)
  - T – Thanksgiving (expressing gratitude to God for blessings)
  - S – Supplications (requests for God to act in others' lives and yours)
3. Find a Bible-believing, preaching, and teaching church. You likely know family, friends, or coworkers who are Christians. They can refer you to a strong church that will help you grow as a disciple of Jesus.

4. Tell others about your relationship with Jesus. It is important to share the joy and hope and peace you've found in Jesus with others so they have the opportunity to trust Him for salvation also. You may be the only person who cares enough to speak to that one about Christ. Don't miss it.

## **Resources for Further Investigation and Study**

### **Truth for Life** – Online or Smart Phone App

This is the teaching ministry of Scotsman Alistair Begg, pastor of Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio. He teaches sound biblical truth in an understandable way. I enjoy his accent.

### **Heaven** – A book by Randy Alcorn

Over 300 pages of information about the eternal home of true followers of Jesus.

### **Reasonable Faith** – Website or YouTube

Dr. William Lane Craig is an Oxford-trained philosopher who addresses the many reasons why Christianity is viable and reasonable.

### **Dr. John Lennox**

He is a mathematician who believes in and follows Christ. He debates atheists and agnostics with clarity and grace. One of my favorites is his debates or discussions with Richard Dawkins.

### **Cross Examined** – Website

The ministry of Dr. Frank Turek. He wrote the book “I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist.” His website has lots of short videos where he defends various aspects of the Gospel.