

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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God's Plan of Salvation

The central theme of the Bible is God's plan to save mankind through Christ. Consider some things Scripture teaches about (1) why we *need* salvation, (2) what *God* has done to make salvation possible, and (3) what *we* must do to be saved.

What Do We Need To Be Saved From?: To appreciate God's plan of salvation, we should understand our *need* for salvation. Notice what the angel of the Lord told Joseph in **Matthew 1:21**: *[Mary] shall give birth to a Son. You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who shall save His people from their sins.*

What Christ saves us from is *sin*.

All who have reached the age and have the mental capacity to know right from wrong have sinned (**Rom. 3:23**). The only exception to this is Jesus Christ (**Heb. 4:15**).

1 John 3:4 defines sin as "*the transgression of the law.*" God has given commands for people in all "dispensations" of time to obey. His commands for *us* are contained in the Law of Christ. When we *commit* something God forbids or *omit* something He requires, we are guilty of sin. We may not have done something the world views as wrong, but we have *sinned against God*.

A follow up question to this might be, "what is the significance of this?" What does it matter that we have sinned?

The answer to this is given in the first part of **Romans 6:23**: *For the wages of sin is death.*

When death is spoken of in Scripture, it may refer to physical death, spiritual death, or eternal death. In any case, the word generally refers to a separation. Physical death refers to separation of the soul and body (**Jas. 2:26**). Spiritual death refers to man being separated

from God. Eternal death refers to *eternal* separation from God (cf. **2 Thes. 1:9**).

Sin is what separates us from God, and thus makes us spiritually dead (**Eph. 2:1**). If someone dies physically being dead *spiritually*, he or she faces *eternal* death.

Eternal death involves spending eternity in hell away from the presence of God. Hell is described by our Lord as a place "*where their worm doesn't die, and the fire is not quenched*" (**Mark 9:48**). It is a place of "*eternal punishment*" (**Matt. 25:46**), where there is no hope of ever being with God again.

This is ultimately the wages of sin. It is what even one sin against God "earns" us. So what we need to be saved from is *sin and its consequences*.

What Did God Do So We Can Be Saved?: God's love prompted Him to do something about mankind's hopeless situation.

The second part of **Romans 6:23** says "*but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" God offers us *eternal life* in heaven.

The fact that eternal life is a gift implies that we do not earn or deserve it. This gift is offered to mankind through God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus walked this earth as God in the flesh. Christ is deity, and took part in creating the world. In fact, "*all things were made through Him. Without Him was not anything made that has been made*" (**John 1:3**). But though He is and has always been deity, God the Son "*emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, yes, the death of the cross*" (**Phil. 2:7-8**).

Because Christ came to earth and was perfectly obedient to the will of the Father, He was able to be offered as God's sacrifice for sin

(cf. **1 Pet. 1:19**). As John the Baptizer said when looking at Christ, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (**John 1:29**).

Christ was obedient to the point of giving His life so we could be saved from sin. The Father *raised* Him from the dead, thus providing hope of eternal life to His faithful children (**1 Cor. 15**).

So through God's plan, Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and the Holy Spirit's revelation of all of this, we have the opportunity to be saved from sin.

What Must We Do To Be Saved?: By fulfilling His role in God's plan of salvation, Jesus became the author of eternal salvation. He did not become the author of eternal salvation to every person *unconditionally*, though. Notice **Hebrews 5:9**: *Having been made perfect, He became to all of those who obey Him the author of eternal salvation,*

This verse shows that in order for us to receive salvation through Christ we must *obey* Him. Salvation is *offered* to everyone, and it is offered as a *gift*. But something is needed on *our* part to receive this gift.

Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus commanded His apostles to tell the world about Him. Notice what He said in **Mark 16:16**: *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned.* Christ Himself made it clear that the salvation He offers is only given to individuals who meet God's terms for salvation.

The apostles obeyed Christ's commission for them, as seen in the book of **Acts**.

In that book, we see several examples of what it takes for one to be added to the body of the saved. It is said or at least implied in each example of conversion that the one(s) converted believed that Jesus is the Son of God upon hearing that truth taught (**Rom. 10:14,17**). Some on the Day of Pentecost responded to this conviction by asking the

apostles, "*Brothers, what shall we do?*" (**Acts 2:37**). The apostle Peter replied, "*Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (**verse 38**). About three thousand souls responded in obedience by repenting and being baptized in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of sins (**verse 41**).

This pattern is seen throughout **Acts**. Individuals who believed the truth about Jesus and were willing to confess that belief (**Acts 8:35-39**), repented of their sins and were "*baptized into Christ*" (**Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27**), and thus added by the Lord to His church, the body of the saved (**Acts 2:47**).

While one enters a saved condition upon being "*baptized into Christ*" as a repentant believer, this does not ensure one can never lose his or her salvation. It is possible to be once saved, yet be "*fallen away from grace*" (**Gal. 5:4**). Christians must faithfully obey God to remain in a saved condition.

When a person sins *after* becoming a Christian, he or she must repent and pray to God, asking for forgiveness of that sin, as **Acts 8:22** shows.

This verse does not suggest that one can say the "sinner's prayer" as a way of becoming a Christian. Rather, it shows that one who is *already* a Christian, as defined by the New Testament (cf. **Acts 8:13**), and has sinned since becoming a Christian (**verse 21**), should repent and pray for forgiveness (**verse 22**).

Much more could be said about God's plan of salvation, but after looking at these points from Scripture, we can understand that salvation is needed because of sin, God did His part to make salvation possible through the work of His Son, and now we must respond in faithful obedience to Him in order to receive the salvation God offers us through His grace.

- **Michael Hickox**