

*What The Bible Says About Salvation*¹

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Preface:

Less than a year ago I was confronted with the challenge of teaching a doctoral level course at a Christian university on “The Minister’s Message of Salvation.” While I have preached about salvation many times, never before had I tried to put together a comprehensive and extensive overview (over forty hours of lecture time) on biblical teaching about salvation. While the Bible is the primary and best textbook, I looked for a supplementary text that would give me guidance and organization in presenting this subject so extensively in a topical manner.² However, I found no book that I considered appropriate for use as a supplementary text on a graduate level I have therefore drafted an outline of what I consider such a book should contain. That draft I now share with you. You can surely make additions and other improvements to it. Perhaps you’ll not think me vain if I hope that these reflections will be of some use to you in thinking about your own salvation or in contemplation of your individual efforts at soul-winning and training others to be soul-winners.

Although the entire Bible in one way or another relates to the subject of salvation, this brief overview of what the Bible says about salvation must be selective and condensed. An effort is made in this presentation to touch on all essential aspects of this subject in a balanced manner. Even so, certain limitations prohibit addressing fully all that the Bible says

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²While I found several books that are excellent, they generally did not meet my desires because they were written not to give an overview of biblical teaching about salvation, but to respond to issues about salvation in the times in which they were written. Most notable among these books, in alphabetical order of authors’ last names, are: Brents, T. W. *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, Gospel Advocate Company. 1874; Campbell, Alexander, *The Christian System*, Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Co. 2nd Ed. 1839, available at <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/cs/> on the internet; Milligan, Robert, *The Scheme of Redemption*, St. Louis, IL: The Bethany Press, 1868; Moser, K. C. *The Way of Salvation, Being an Exposition of God’s Method of Justification Through Christ*, Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1932, available at <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/moser/> on the internet; Warren, Virgil, *What The Bible Says About Salvation*, Joplin, MO: College Press, 1982. There are, of course, published editions of curriculum materials used in adult class studies in churches, such as Wendell Winkler’s book, *Things That Accompany Salvation*. And there are also an abundance of books and tracts related to individual topics, like grace, faith, and baptism within the overall scope of salvation.

about salvation. Some people like those on the Day of Pentecost, the Ethiopian treasurer, Lydia and her household, and the Philippian jailor heard and obeyed the gospel in an hour's time or less. They surely did not know everything God has revealed about the subject of salvation, yet they knew enough to be saved. We know not what prior information or situation may have influenced their receptivity of the gospel message when it was first presented to them. So also, we can present the essential aspects of salvation, without reviewing every detail and realize that what is presented may be sufficient.

Introduction:

God's plan for saving humanity from the consequences of sin was mysterious until the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus. When that mystery was finally revealed it was then characterized as "good news," i.e., the gospel. The message of the gospel is about how people may be saved from the guilt and consequences of sin. Those who believe and obey God's commandments contained in the gospel message of salvation manifest a sense of joy and awe as they change their attitudes, behavior, and relationships. This message is divided into three parts – the mystery, the gospel, and the changes.

The Mystery of God

Nature and Content of God's Mystery

The Apostle Paul wrote that the mystery of God was ordained before the beginning of "the world unto our glory."³ It was "kept secret since the world began,"⁴ hidden "in God who created all things"⁵ from "ages and generations."⁶ But now the mystery "has been made manifest"⁷ "to his saints"⁸ "by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets."⁹ By "the prophetic Scriptures" the mystery "has been made known to all nations."¹⁰ According to his "eternal purpose"¹¹ "the everlasting God"¹² also intended that his manifold wisdom "might be made known by the church"¹³ "for obedience to the faith."¹⁴ The Apostle Peter observed

³1 Corinthians 2:7

⁴Romans 16:25

⁵Ephesians 3:9

⁶Colossians 1:26

⁷Romans 16:26

⁸Colossians 1:25

⁹Ephesians 3:5

¹⁰Romans 16:26

¹¹Ephesians 3:11

¹²Romans 16:26

¹³Ephesians 3:10

¹⁴Romans 16:26

that neither the Old Testament prophets nor even the angels in heaven fully understood the workings of God in bringing salvation to humanity.¹⁵

The content of God's mystery is precisely stated, namely that "the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6). The Apostle Paul declared that "God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:25-27). Paul's emphasis in these statements is that Gentiles should be united together with the Jews in the same body.

However, the implications that come from these statements about God's mystery required more than just a union between Jew and Gentile.

- It required that while God wanted all humanity saved, he did not choose to reveal his desires until he was ready.
- It required that God had some plan to bring about human salvation and that this plan needed to be worked out over a period of time.
- It required the development of "prophetic scriptures" through whom God's mystery would be revealed to all nations (Romans 16:26).
- It required the establishment of the church before his manifold wisdom could be made known (Ephesians 3:10).
- It required the development of "his saints" to whom the mystery would be revealed (Colossians 1:25).
- It required the birth of "holy apostles and prophets" through whom the mystery would be revealed (Ephesians 3:5).
- It required the development of categorical distinctions between peoples yet unborn who would become known as Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 3:6).
- It required that the Christ should come through whom both Jews and Gentiles could be "partakers of His promise."
- It required that Jews and Gentiles be of the same body "in Christ through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6).

The content of God's mystery encompassed all of these workings of God to bring about human salvation.

¹⁵ More precisely, Peter wrote that ... "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹²To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things which angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Beginnings of the Mystery – Man, Sin, and Estrangement

With the creation of humanity, God began to set his mysterious plan in motion. The origin of God's mystery may be better understood by asking four questions which are partially answered in the first four chapters of Genesis.¹⁶

First, why did God create the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1 – 2:4)? No one knows fully, but surely a good answer would include the concepts that God wanted to create a habitation for humanity and that God wanted fellowship with humanity. Think about that for a moment. Does not that idea make you feel like God placed great value on humanity? God gave mankind a wonderful gift of the heavens and the earth? And he sought fellowship with his creation when he came walking in the garden to visit with Adam and Eve.

Second, what is the meaning of the fact that man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27)? The answer lies partially in discovering the nature of God as revealed in the creation account.

First, God is a spirit – humans are spiritual (as well as physical) in nature.

Second, God is ruler – mankind is to have dominion over nature.

Third, God has a will – mankind has will power (i.e., ability to choose to obey or disobey).

Fourth, God is a social being. “Let us” indicates plurality in Godhead – humanity is social, i.e., male and female.

Fifth, God works – mankind is to work.

Sixth, God is good – evidenced by his creation that “was very good” – mankind is to be good.

Seventh, God is a moral being, i.e., holy, separate - mankind was created morally pure, i.e., holy, sinless, separate from other animals.

Third, what separated man from God (Genesis 3:1 – 4:16)? Was it not disobedience? That's the answer given on a different occasion by Isaiah. “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear” (59:1-2). Notice the nature of sin.

- Sin is enticing – i.e., attractive, alluring.
- Sin is disobedience – i.e., rebellion, transgression, etc.
- Sin is deceptive – it promises more than it gives. God is offended by sin. Man feels personal shame and guilt. Alienation and estrangement came between God and humanity as the first couple was expelled from the Garden. Destruction and death

¹⁶Genesis, chapters one and two, details the creation of the heavens and the earth and all things therein. It also describes God's creation of a Garden of Eden for human habitation along with God's care of and instruction to the first human couple, Adam and Eve. Chapter three details the sin of Adam and Eve and God's displeasure and punishment upon them. Chapter four describes the birth of children, worship to God, the sin and punishment of Cain, and his descendents.

follows for humanity. Man no longer has the pleasant task of keeping the Garden of Eden, he must now work by the sweat of his face. Woman must bear children in pain.

Fourth, *how can humanity be reconciled to God?* That's the question! Only God can reconcile mankind to himself. Humans cannot because everyone is a sinner. Everyone offends God by their sins. Therefore, God took the initiative to bring about reconciliation. How God would reconcile himself to humanity was a mystery not fully revealed to humanity until after the coming of his Son.

The Mystery Was Partially Revealed in Plans, Promises and Prophecies

Disclosure of mystery requires giving information that was previously unknown. We who live after Christ have advantages over those who lived before Christ because God's mystery has now been revealed (1 Peter 1:10-12). The mysterious redemption that was purposed, planned, promised, prophesied, prepared, and proclaimed must be understood in its historical context and may be considered under concepts related to the covenants, Christ, and the church. Those concepts are conveyed through terms like redemption, reconciliation, justification, salvation and others.

The first inkling of God's plans for human redemption was made to Adam and Eve immediately following their sin. That's when God said that he would put enmity between the serpent and the woman, "between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:14-15). What God meant by that statement must have been a mystery to Adam and Eve. They surely could not then have fully understood what others later came to consider a prophecy about Christ. Maybe Adam and Eve took comfort from the fact that although they had disobeyed God, their posterity would be victorious.

That God wanted a relationship between himself and humanity is indicated by the fact that he established a medium of worship during the days of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). God also required faith and righteous living (Hebrews 11:4-6). Both Abel and Enoch walked by faith (Hebrews 11:4-5) and were approved by God for their righteousness. After Seth begot Enosh, people began to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26). Because Enoch walked by faith with God, he did not die. God simply took him (Genesis 5:24). Noah, a righteous man (Genesis 7:1), a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), lived by faith (Hebrews 11:7) and found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). But the overwhelming majority of people were wicked (Genesis 6:5). Because God cannot tolerate wickedness, he determined

to destroy the earth with a flood (Genesis 6:7). Only Noah and his family were spared (Genesis 7:23).

Ten generations after Noah, God promised Abraham, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). That promise was renewed with Abraham’s son, Isaac (Genesis 26:4) and with his grandson, Jacob (Genesis 28:14). We know not what they may have thought about that promise. They probably did not fully understand it. The promise is not fully explained in the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul observed that God did not say “‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘and to your Seed,’ who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). When God made his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he surely had something more and greater in his mind than they could have realized. They probably did not realize that the blessings upon all nations would come primarily from one person, and he would be the Son of God!

When Jacob was about to die, he pronounced a blessing upon each of his sons. To Judah he said, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to him shall be the obedience of the people” (Genesis 49:10). The language of a “scepter” indicates kingship while the statements about a “lawgiver” and “obedience of the people” reinforces the concept of a ruler. The prophecy looks forward not just to a line of kings, but also creates an expectation of a great one to come among them. When and how these things would come to pass remained a mystery throughout the entirety of Old Testament times.

Sometime later, when the Israelites were about to enter the promised land of Canaan, Moses declared, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” (Deuteronomy 18:15). “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18). In Acts 3:20-23,¹⁷ the Apostle Peter affirmed that this prophet about which Moses spoke was none other than the Christ. We know not whether the ancient Israelites whom Moses addressed considered the

¹⁷Acts 3:20-23, “and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. ²²For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. ²³And it shall be *that* every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.”

prophet about which he spoke to be the same person that Jacob had predicted when he spoke to Judah. When these two passages are considered together the meaning is that the future lawgiver and king would also be a prophet who would speak as directed by God.

Several hundred years later, God promised David, who was from the lineage of Judah and king over Israel, that “when your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:12, 16). With this promise, God revealed that the future lawgiver, king, and prophet would rule over an everlasting kingdom.

The prophet Isaiah gave more particulars when he said, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6-7). Both Isaiah and Micah prophesied about the nature of this kingdom. (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3).¹⁸ The prophets envisioned a marvelous kingdom of peace! The prophet Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar about great kingdoms but then declared the superiority of God’s everlasting kingdom over all others (Daniel 2:44).¹⁹ The establishment of an everlasting kingdom required not only a great prophet and king, but also a new covenant which was prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34; see also Hebrews 8:6-13).²⁰

¹⁸ They said, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; he will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore”

¹⁹ He said that “in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever”

²⁰ The prophet Jeremiah said, “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. . . . But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know

God's promises to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to Moses, to David, and others through the centuries were progressively revealed by many prophets. A limited compilation of God's promises would include the following facts. Satan will be defeated. All nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham's seed. A lawgiver and king will come from Judah. A prophet will be raised up like Moses through whom God would speak to the people. An everlasting kingdom will be established from the lineage of David. The everlasting kingdom will destroy all other kingdoms. The everlasting kingdom will be one of peace where everyone will not have to be taught the word of God because they will already know the Lord. In that kingdom, God will forgive all sins. For this kingdom, God will establish a new covenant.

These promises and many others all relate to reconciling sinful humanity back to God. Contemplations of these promises – however inadequate and incomplete they may have been – would surely have evoked marvelous wonderment in the minds of anyone who gave them serious thought. However, these promises were not generally understood. They remained mysterious until apostolic times.

The Mystery Was Partially Revealed in Shadows and Realities

God's wonderful promises of blessings upon humanity were as mysterious as shadows. Shadows reveal the presence of a reality but do not fully disclose the nature of the reality. Not until after Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven did God reveal the essential meaning of those shadows. Shadows may be described as types of anti-types that are yet to appear. The New Testament makes many general declarations about types and anti-types related to persons, priesthood, sacrifice, covenants, and other topics having to do with salvation.²¹ Some specific scriptures are worthy of our noting. The Apostle John wrote that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The

the LORD,' for they all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more"

²¹ Respecting persons, Adam, the first man, is an anti-type of Christ (Romans 5:14). In various ways, other Old Testament characters, e.g., Moses, Jonah, David, etc. also serve as types of Christ. Respecting the priesthood, Melchizedek, as a priest, was a type of the high priesthood of Christ (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6; 6:20). Respecting sacrifice, those under the Law of Moses were but a shadow of the sacrifice of Christ who was yet to come (Hebrews 9:28-10:10). Moreover, the Passover lamb was but a type of "Christ, our Passover," who was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). Respecting covenants, the first covenant was but a shadow of the second which was yet to come (Hebrews 8:5-13). The "handwriting of requirements" (Colossians 2:14) declared in the Mosaic law were but "a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Colossians 2:17).

Apostle Paul wrote, “I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). The Apostle Peter wrote that “the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:20-21).

Obviously, these types were understood only after the antitypes appeared. They probably were not even originally recognized as types of antitypes that would later appear. Therefore, while little if any sense of mystery may have been associated with these types at times when they occurred they were later realized to be a part of God’s gradually unfolding plan to redeem humanity. Only then would they have been realized as a part of God’s revelation of the mystery of salvation.

The Gospel – God’s Good News

Salvation was accomplished by the blood of Christ

Neither the mysterious promises of God nor Old Testament types in themselves resolved the need for human redemption. Promises had to be fulfilled and shadowy types had to have realities of antitypes revealed before humanity could be redeemed. Prophecies and types ceased and the silence of God fell upon the world for about four hundred years before the gospel message of salvation was revealed. Gentiles had forgotten God and drifted into idolatry. They were morally depraved and perverted (Romans 1:18-32). Jews stood condemned because they also sinned and could not be justified by the Law of Moses (Romans 2:1-16). Yet, because of the promises recorded in Jewish scriptures which were now read in synagogues throughout the Mediterranean basin, there was much expectation that God would send a world leader to establish his promised kingdom.

Into this setting “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). He exhorted the people to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2). He was “a voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight’” (Matthew 3:3). “He preached, saying, ‘there comes one after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize

you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:7-8). John’s work was intended to reform people’s hearts in order that they might be prepared for the coming of the Savior.

And then Jesus came. Before Jesus was born, the angel Gabriel told his mother that “he will . . . be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). When Jesus came he preached the same message that John had preached, “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). God wants people to live righteously.

Jesus was recognized as a “teacher come from God (John 3:2). Jesus taught throughout all Judea (Luke 23:5). He went about all the cities and villages teaching (Matthew 9:35; Mark 6:6; Luke 13:22). He taught in the synagogues (Matthew 9:35) on the Sabbaths (Luke 4:31; 13:10) and in the temple (Matthew 21:23; 26:55; Mark 14:49; Luke 19:47; 21:37). The people were astonished at his teaching (Matthew 22:33; Mark 11:18) for he taught “as one having authority” (Matthew 7:28; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32). Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught the people and trained his apostles in righteousness. But however much people may know about righteous living, people still sin and therefore still need reconciliation with God.

Jesus’ purpose was not just to teach. He had to be about his “father’s business” (Luke 2:49). God sent His Son into the world “that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17, see also John 12:47). Jesus claimed that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10). More specifically, he said that he came to “give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). In giving his life a ransom, Christ became “an offering and a sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). He was offered “to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:28). Signifying that he would die on the cross, Jesus said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself” (John 12:32). Therefore “He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). Jesus sacrificed himself to pay for the sins of humanity. He died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3).

What Jesus accomplished by dying on the cross may be stated in various ways. “We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10). He reconciled both Jew and Gentile “to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity

(Ephesians 2:16). “He wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross”

(Colossians 2:14). “We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins”

(Colossians 1:14) according to the riches of God’s grace (Ephesians 1:7). “Being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9). With his blood, Christ obtained “eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12).

Salvation was revealed by the Holy Spirit

The salvation message and accompanying events that were presented by Jesus during his lifetime were not generally understood by the multitudes, the religious leaders, or even Jesus’ followers. Nor was the death of Jesus immediately understood by his disciples. It was mysterious. It was then still a part of God’s progressive revelation. Its meaning would not be fully understood until it was revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Before he died, Jesus told his apostles that “the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name . . . will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). Jesus also told his apostles, “When he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak; and he will tell you things to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13-14). After his resurrection but before his ascension, Jesus instructed his apostles to remain “in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Ten days later, on the occasion of the next Pentecost, when all the apostles were “with one accord in one place” in the temple at Jerusalem, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:3-4).

The Holy Spirit came to guide the apostles in their teaching, just as Jesus had promised. On that occasion, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle declared that the resurrection of the Messiah had been prophesied by David, and that since Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead, of which the apostles were witnesses, then Jesus is proved to be the Messiah. This truth could not be denied by the multitude because it was accompanied by a sudden miracle that had just come upon them – “a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them” (Acts 2:2-3).

When on that day of Pentecost, people heard the inspired word of God from the mouths of the Apostle Peter, three thousand believed and obeyed the command to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit had a role in the conversion of people on the day of Pentecost, but its role was through the word of God that was spoken by the Apostle Peter (Acts 2:41).

The role of the Holy Spirit in conversion is always through the word. The Apostle Peter wrote that no prophetic word “came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). The Apostle Paul quoted Isaiah’s statement that “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him.” Then Paul observed that “God has revealed them to us through his Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. . . . These things *we* also *speak*, not in *words* which man’s wisdom teaches, but *which the Holy Spirit teaches*, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10, 13). The Ephesians could read Paul’s message about the mystery of Christ with certainty because “it has now been *revealed by the Spirit* to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:3-5). [Emphasis added with bold italics by RLW].

The Holy Spirit supplies the message, i.e., the word. The message, i.e., “the law of the Lord” converts the soul (Psalm 19:7). God brings us forth “by the word of truth” (James 1:18). Jesus said that “everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me (John 6:45). Hearing the word of God may produce faith (Romans 10:17). Faith (i.e., belief) is essential to salvation (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 16:31). Thus the Holy Spirit reveals the word of God; hearing the word of God may produce faith; and faith, by God’s grace, results in salvation (Ephesians 2:8).

Salvation is by the grace of God

Through the Holy Spirit the mystery of Christ, “which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men,” was revealed “to his holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:4-5). The Apostle Paul considered that God was gracious to him by making him a minister of the gospel to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:7-9). The “fellowship of the mystery” is but one way of saying that in Christ both Jews and Gentiles are joined in a common salvation. The righteousness of God, i.e., justification by God, is

revealed to both Jew and Gentile, Paul wrote, “through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:21-24). The Apostle Peter argued “that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we [Jews] shall be saved in the same manner as they [Gentiles]” (Acts 15:11). Paul wrote Titus, saying that “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). The writer of Hebrews stated that Jesus “was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9). The Apostle John wrote that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16-17).

God has always been gracious. He was gracious when he planned human redemption before the foundations of the world. He was gracious when he made promises to Adam and Eve; to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; to David and others. He was gracious when he gave prophecies through Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. He graciously displayed shadows of realities that were yet to come. By his grace, he gave a law through Moses, established a priest hood, designated worship practices, developed the nation of Israel, and through such as these called for the people to live righteously. He was gracious in sending his Son to atone for the sins of humanity. He was gracious in sending the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles in the proclamation of his word. God’s grace is more easily recognized and understood, however, now that his mystery has been revealed.

Salvation is by faith in Christ

God’s grace of salvation is limited, however, only to those who trust him and obey his commandments. The history of humanity indicates that while some people trust and obey God, most do not. Although Adam and Eve, as well as their son, Cain, disobeyed God, Abel was faithful. Most of the people before the flood were unrighteous, but Enoch and Noah were faithful. Only Joshua and Caleb of over six hundred thousand adult men who left Egypt for the Promised Land were able to enter therein (Numbers 32:11-12). All others over the age of

twenty were unfaithful. And so it has always been.²² God always bestows his blessings on those few who trust and obey.

When therefore God's grace of salvation through Christ Jesus was proclaimed on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, there were about three thousand who believed, repented, and were baptized (Acts 2:41), but many rejected the message of salvation that was proclaimed during the apostolic age. And so it has ever been during Christian history that people have continued to reject God's gracious message of salvation. For them there is no promise of salvation.²³

The fundamental requirement of God has always been that people be faithful to him. Fundamental to faith is trust in God. Faith is the means by which Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the Judges, and a host of others were justified before God (see Hebrews 11). Habakkuk noted the significance of faith when he said, "Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). The apostle Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." And then he quoted Habakkuk's statement that "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17). The Revised Standard Version may have a better wording. It reads, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Faith in Christ is what enables people to live before God. Just as Abraham believed in God and it was accounted to him for righteousness,²⁴ so also "it shall be imputed to us who believe in him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Rom 4:24-25; 5:1-2).

The content of the belief that saves, while stated variously, focuses on the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus told the Pharisees that "if you do not believe that I

²² Jesus exhorted his disciples to "enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

²³ "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

²⁴ "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6; James 2:22).

am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). The Gospel of John was written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). When the jailor at Philippi ask Paul what he must do to be saved, Paul replied that he should “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). In the synagogue at Corinth, “Paul was compelled by the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:5). When Paul came to Achaia, “he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:28). At Ephesus, Paul told disciples of John the Baptist that “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4). The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was demonstrated to be proof that Jesus is the Christ. Peter so argued at Pentecost (Acts 2:32-36). Paul wrote to the Romans “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

To be saved by trusting in God and believing that Jesus is the Christ is to do more than acknowledge that God exist and that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Mental assent to truth is not what saves. “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!” (James 2:19). Surely no one thinks that the demons will be saved! Paul once asked King Agrippa, “do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.’ Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian’” (Acts 26:27-28). Although King Agrippa may have believed, surely no one will argue that his belief saved him? Why? Why were not the demons and King Agrippa saved? Is it not because believers must be obedient? Does not James argue that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14-26). James illustrated that faith must work by citing examples of Abraham’s faith being demonstrated when he offered Isaac and Rahab’s faith being demonstrated when she sent out spies a different way than they had come (James 2:21-26). Should anyone think that justification is by faith only, by works only, or by a combination of both faith and works, then the scripture should be remembered that “God commends his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Moreover, “by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus that for good works, which God prepared beforehand, we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

An obedient faith requires many things other. *Obedient faith requires that Jesus be confessed as the Christ.* Jesus promised that “whoever confesses me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32, see also Luke 12:8). The apostle Paul wrote that “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Obedient faith requires that the believers repent of their past sins. The apostle Peter declared that believers should “repent, and . . . be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38; see also Acts 3:19). After God sent Paul to preach among the Gentiles to “turn them . . . from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins,” Paul later declared that he “was not disobedient . . . but declared . . . to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Acts 26:18-20). Moreover, even after a believer has been saved from past sins, repentance is required for whatever sins are later committed. When a magician who had already become a Christian was realized to have a heart that was not right with God, the apostle Peter told him to “repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22). Churches at Ephesus and at Pergamos were both told to repent of their wrongs (Revelation 2:5, 16).

Obedient faith requires that believers be baptized, i.e., immersed in water for the remission of sins. That’s precisely what the apostle Peter required of believers on the first Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 2:38). Later, at the house of Cornelius, Peter asked, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:47-48). Even he who was to become the great apostle Paul was instructed to “arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The apostle Peter declared that baptism, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is “an antitype which now saves us” (1 Peter 3:21). Jesus himself had taught that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

Obedient faith requires that the believer always remain faithful to God. Reconciliation to God is conditioned on whether “you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (Colossians 1:23). The Hebrew writer observed that “we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end (Hebrews 3:14). To the church at Smyrna

who were about to endure great persecution, the Lord said, ‘Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life’ (Revelation 2:10).

A Saved Life Is A Changed Life

Salvation Changes Relationships

When you are saved you become a child of God. God becomes your father, in a new and different sense, because you can now intimately say, ‘Abba, Father’ (Romans 8:15). The apostle John observed, ‘Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 John 3:1). ‘And if children, then [we are] heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ’ (Romans 8:17; also Galatians 4:6-7).

When you are saved you enter the family of God. Paul wrote Timothy in order that ‘you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God’ (1 Timothy 3:15). The ‘house’ or ‘household’ of God is descriptive of those within the inner circle of the family of God, who love and care for one another, and over whom God, the Father, is head. Jesus said that ‘whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’ (Matthew 12:50).

When you are saved God adds you to the church (Acts 2:47). When you are saved, you are delivered ‘from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love’ (Colossians 1:13). If you are faithful to God, you remain in his kingdom, the church. That the church is a kingdom is evident from many scriptures. The expressions ‘church’ and ‘kingdom of heaven’ seem often to be used interchangeably, as in Matthew 16:18-19.

Salvation Changes Attitudes

When you are saved you are joyful and thankful for your salvation. Those who first obeyed apostolic preaching ‘ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people’ (Acts 2:46-47). After the Ethiopian was baptized, ‘he went on his way rejoicing’ (Acts 8:39). The apostle Peter wrote to believers who were being tested that ‘though now you do not see [Christ], yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls’ (1 Peter 1:8-9). Like persons who’ve been saved from death, Christians are grateful for having been rescued from sin and its consequences.

When you are saved you look forward to an eternal home in heaven with God. The father of our Lord Jesus Christ ‘has begotten us again to a living hope through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4). The apostle Paul acknowledged “hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:2). Having been justified by God’s grace, we “become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7).

Salvation Changes Behavior

When you are saved you change your desires. As a newborn child of God you “desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). You want to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Because you have been made a partaker of the divine nature, “having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,” you develop Godly character qualities by adding “to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (2 Peter 1:5-7).

When you are saved you must live righteously before God. Repentance requires that you turn away from whatever behavioral practices may have been in your old ways of living that were inconsistent with the character of God and that you “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Ephesians 4:1). The apostle Paul wrote that “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12). He told his brethren at Thessalonica that “God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7).²⁵

Loving God and one’s neighbor are the greatest behavioral commandments. Jesus informed one of the scribes that “you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

²⁵ Paul instructed the Colossians “to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:8-14).

When you are saved you become a worker for the Lord. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to laborers working in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). He said that he is the true vine and that his disciples are the branches. If disciples do not bear fruit they taken away to be burned like unproductive branches (John 15:2, 6). Paul told the Corinthians that “we are God’s fellow workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9; see also 2 Corinthians 6:1). And he exhorted Timothy to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed” (2 Timothy 2:15). More specifically, Jesus instructed his disciples to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20).

When you are saved you worship God. Worship is the human spirit in communion with the spirit of God (Philippians 3:3). Communion is but a combination of two words, “common” and “union” which is illustrated by the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Worship must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Worship may be motivated by a sense of awe toward God for his greatness in creating the world (Revelation 14:7). Christian worship results from recognizing God’s blessings in bringing salvation (Acts 2:46-47). Christians meet together on the Lord’s Day to worship God and to edify one another.

Conclusion:

When we are saved we are like the ancient Israelites who had passed through the Red Sea and escaped from the bondage of Egypt (Exodus 14). We have passed through the watery grave of baptism and have been delivered from the bondage of sin (Romans 6). As those Israelites rejoiced because God had delivered them from their oppressors (Exodus 15) so also we can rejoice because God has brought us deliverance from the consequences of our past sins (Acts 8:39; Romans 5:11). But just as the Israelites had yet to journey through the wilderness before they could cross over Jordan to enter the Promised Land, so also we must sojourn through this life until time comes for us to pass from this life to whatever is beyond. Just here, the failure of the Israelites as they journeyed through the wilderness should serve as a warning to us. Many times, they murmured and complained against God and against Moses (Exodus 16:2; 17:3; Numbers 11:1; 14:2, 29; 16:14; Deuteronomy 1:27). People who complain about their circumstances and murmur against authorities do not live by faith. They do not trust the powers that be. The Israelites focused on their difficulties and failed to recognize their blessings. When God promised to give them the land of Canaan (Exodus 13:5; Leviticus 20:24), they did not believe him, i.e., they did not trust him to make good on

his promises. They thought that the Promised Land had to be taken by their own might, and they thought that that was impossible (Numbers 13:26-33). We cannot save ourselves by our own works. God saves us. But, God saves us only when we trust him. Because these Israelites who had already been saved from past sins did not believe God, God prohibited them from entering into the Promised Land. They died in the wilderness (Hebrews 3:16-19). So also, even though we have been saved from past sins, we cannot be saved eternally unless we trust God as we journey through this life.

Salvation is thus temporary and eternal. First, we are saved from past sins at the time when we are baptized and thereby come into the family of God. Second, we are saved eternally at the end of life's journey if in this life we have continued to live by faith. Paul told the Ephesians that in the ages to come God would "show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). And Peter urged brethren to "gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13). If a person sins, after having been saved, he can repent and not be lost eternally. The Apostle John wrote that "if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he himself is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1-2). An example of this situation is that of a magician who wanted to purchase the ability to enable people to perform miracles and thereby make himself a profit. The Apostle Peter told him "repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:20-22).

The Israelites obtained their promised land, not by crossing the Red Sea, but by crossing the Jordan River. In like manner, we obtain our promised inheritance not just by being baptized but by having lived faithfully (1 Peter 1:3-5) so that when this life is over, the Lord will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21).

The Israelites understood that the Promised Land to which they were going was a land of prosperity, "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 14:8; Deuteronomy 6:3; 11:9; 26:9; 27:3). How are we to visualize the grandeur of that eternal kingdom that God has promised to those who are saved in Christ Jesus? The Apostle John gives us a glimpse of that future reality. He describes the land of salvation as "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). It is a place where "God is with men, and he shall dwell with them." There "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain" (Revelation 21:3-4). "There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but

only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life” (Revelation 21:27). There John saw “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. . . . And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. . . . There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:1-3, 5).

What a marvelous place! What marvelous fellowship there will be not only with all the redeemed, but also with God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! Do you not want to be among those who endure faithfully to the end of life in order that you may receive such a grand and glorious inheritance?