

Eternal Life – Eternally Saved

(Prophecy – John 3:16)

Introduction

Paul and Silas were in jail at Phillipi because they had healed a demon-possessed slave girl (NET) who brought monetary gain to her owners (Acts 16:7-40). These evangelists sang hymns at midnight in the dark inner section of the prison.

- An earthquake flung open the prison doors and chains fell from the prisoners. Paul assured the jailer that all were accounted for.
- This man then, with deep gratitude, asked, *“What must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16:30). An amazing response!

The answer immediately came: *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”* (Acts 16:31).

- *“believe”* is *pisteuo* (G)
- It means not only being convinced that Jesus is the Messiah (simple faith) but taking steps to obey him.¹

Most expositors relegate salvation (being saved) to a simple ill-defined life that “pleases God.” Many do not go beyond a limited acknowledgment (faith, per se – *pistis* – G). But there are deeper relationship issues that demand our attention. It is summed up in *“believe.”*

The Sinner’s Need of Christ²

It was clearly Satan’s desire to fill the earth with woe and make man captive to his evil ways. When Adam and Eve fell, anguish and adversity began. Man’s nature quickly changed.

- *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Romans 8:7-8).

*“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are **spiritually discerned**”* (I Corinthians 2:14).

¹ TWDNT

² *Steps to Christ*, pp. 17-22 (adapted).

- Education, culture and even human effort are powerless to change the heart.
- Paul sensed his own weakness and cried: *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* (Romans 7:24).

He saw the “light,” then believed and discovered what he was really like. He wanted salvation, peace and to be part of God’s kingdom. Finally, he could say:

- *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those **who are in Christ Jesus**”* (Romans 8:1 – NET).
- His vision of Christ became so profound and his appreciation of what He did for man’s salvation so deep that he wrote: *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39).
- God’s love is unconditional. Man’s response without Christ is, however, fitful and even impulsive.

Peter Deepens Our Understanding³

It was the Day of Pentecost. Thousands made decisions to give their hearts to Christ. They were convicted of sin. Again, they cry:

- *“What shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37).
- The answer: *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38).

Amazing keys to salvation are here opened up (vs 40).

1. Repent:
 - Sorrow for sin because of its consequences is not repentance.
 - Repentance includes **sorrow for committing sin** and then **turning away from it**.
 - It leads to pleading for purity of heart, like David prayed (Psalm 32:1-2, 51:1-14).
2. Baptism is part of the path to eternal life. Christ even gave His approval by being baptized as an example to follow.
3. The gift of the Holy Spirit will then come in a special way!

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-56.

“Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire, ***persistently cherished***, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel.... ‘Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.’ ‘Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’ 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:7, 8.”⁴

- Our prayer: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*” (Psalm 139:23-24).

To repent means that we recognize there is such a thing as sin and it is terrible in God’s sight.

- “*He that committeth sin is of the devil*” (1 John 3:8a).
“*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin*” (1 John 3:9a).
- “*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy*” (Proverbs 28:13).

How do we get rid of sin so it is not charged against us?

“*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9).

The Faith Factor⁵

“Believe in Christ” and “faith” are Christian buzzwords that many superficially use. But their meaning is actually profound and instructive, as we previously noted (Introduction).

Somewhere between recognizing our need and seeing that need filled with Christ comes a “confidence factor” called ***faith*** (*pistis* – G).

This is beneficially addressed by Paul:

“*But without faith it is impossible to please him*” (Hebrews 11:6a). That means that He is happy in the positive response we have toward Him!

- To please God, to be in a friendship relationship that He accepts, we must have ***faith***. There is something about Christ I like!
- Paul already said: “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-56 (adapted).

But – does that mean hoping for something I can't see?

1. Biblical faith universally reveals Jesus as its object. "I have faith in Jesus!" It is based upon the evidence or testimony of others and the Bible.
2. *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must **believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him**"* (Hebrews 11:6).
 - a. Things **hoped for** means "being sure of."⁶ Something in the future.
 - b. In our encounter with Jesus, we conclude that He is real, He is God, He is also a true friend.
 - c. Therefore – our belief in Him is so real that He is **our reality** to a point we want to **please Him!**
3. How did that reality come (from others and the Bible)?
 - a. There is conviction of His reality.
 - b. Then we earnestly seek to "experience Him"!
 - c. Then in that journey we discover the reality of Jesus Christ and never stop learning more about Him.

Then, as we encounter Him, we confess our sins. We then receive:

- Justification – forgiveness (Galatians 2:16).
- Salvation (by grace – God's unmerited favor) (Ephesians 2:8)

That **faith** brings a state of grace – salvation! God is so amazing to take us right then!

A Warning – A Caution

If I surrender my heart at an altar call and have no desire to repent, confess or be baptized, am I still saved?

How do we deal with that? That is resistance, even rebellion.

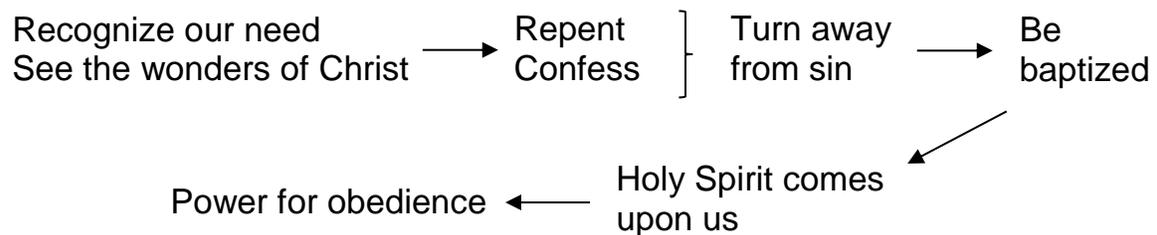
- *"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left"* (Hebrews 10:26 – NIV).
- Some may produce "fruit" in good deeds (works) and serve nobly the cause of God. But this is willful resistance to God's will. Only those who do the will of God can enter the kingdom (Matthew 6:10, 12:50, 21:31, 26:42).

⁶ Allen, David; *The New American Commentary – Hebrews* (Hebrews 1:2) (B&H Publishing Group; Nashville, TN), p. 542.

That would be apostasy! Scholars have evaluated the ancient Greek in these verses, tying them to Paul's study in Hebrews 3:12 and 6:4-6. It means:

1. The individual has already received the gospel and a knowledge of truth.
2. They fall into the category of having understood truth.
3. Now they willfully, deliberately, sin or break away from what is right.⁷ That is a firm choice.

A "believer" cannot presume upon the salvation brought to him or her by Christ. That is presumption – exactly what Eve had in the Garden of Eden.



The moment I honestly repent of my sins and commit to follow Jesus, I am justified – forgiven – saved.

What do we obey? How do I know what sin is?

Paul said: "*By the **law** is the knowledge of sin*" (Romans 3:20).

John said: "*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the **law**: for sin is the transgression of the **law***" (1 John 3:4).

- A law (some divine code) determines what sin is.
- Jesus even said: "*If ye love me, keep my **commandments***" (John 14:15).

What law, what commandments, is Christ and Paul referring to?

- There is one way to determine this.
- When one studies the various lists of things God despises and that the apostles speak against, we can identify which "*law*" is alluded to. Paul defines those who follow such acts as having reprobate minds (e.g. in Romans 1:28-32, Galatians 5:19-21, II Timothy 3:1-5). We discover that there are regulations to put a check on those sins. They are permanent, written even by the finger of God (Deuteronomy 9:10). They can all be summarized in the Ten Commandments that were written in stone (Exodus 31:18).

⁷ Allen, *op. cit.* (Hebrews 10:26).

Many claim that the Ten Commandments were done away with. This is called an *anomian* belief (without law).

- 99% of pastors and scholars who identify with this do so to avoid the fourth commandment regarding the Sabbath.
- This has become even an emotional issue with Bible expositors. Today, scholarly articles often support all aspects of the Ten Commandments, called the Decalogue, except the Sabbath.

Paul made a profound statement when writing to the Hebrews: *“For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.... There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God”* (Hebrews 4:4, 9).

Echoing the Old Testament as to how serious obedience versus disobedience is: *“Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezekiel 28:4).

- Life eternal is the inheritance of the righteous.
- Death that lasts forever is the portion of the wicked.

All this means that salvation is ***conditional!***

- God loved the world so much that He gave His son to save it.
- Christ died for everyone. His love is unconditional.
- But – it is our choice to position ourselves to receive His saving grace.

It’s like this: We are like a water bucket. The bucket does not create water. It has to be positioned under the faucet to receive it. If it is moved from its position, it no longer receives water. But the faucet is never turned off.

- We have to be positioned where we can receive from the “faucet of grace.”
- Positioning ourselves can be done when we repent and decide to follow Jesus. Following Him means that we copy Him and seek to honor His instruction.

The Christian Life is a Lifestyle of Faith

Note how exciting this was to Paul: *“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your **faith** is spoken of throughout the whole world”* (Romans 1:8).

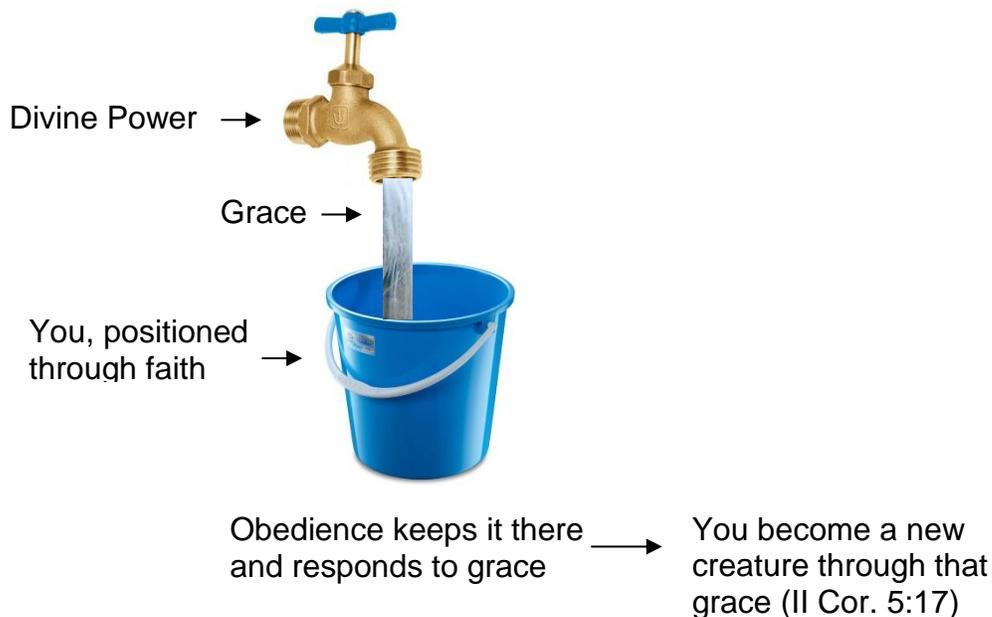
In your conviction (*faith*) that Jesus is your Savior, the word *“faith”* is a noun. It is so deep that the world can even see that commitment.

He later noted: *“For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the **obedience of faith**”* (Romans 16:19, 26).

Amazing! Faith is so important to understand that Paul called it the *“obedience of faith.”* He actually is alluding to that action anticipated by *pistis* (faith).

- That is summed up when the New Testament writers use the word *“believe.”* The conviction that Christ is Savior moves one to please Him.
- This phrase means that God’s purpose in the life of a Christian is being fulfilled.
- Paul never conceived a salvation without a change of behavior or making Christ happy.

We are to become servants of righteousness. ***Obedience flows out of faith!***



“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Can we lose our salvation?

Frequently quoted verses that are misused:

- *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39).

- Many conclude that we can never be separated from that relationship with God.

But – these verses have nothing to do with salvation or eternal life. It is about God’s unconditional love for man. It never quits. The faucet is never turned off.

- Recall the fall of Adam and Eve. They were perfect – until they fell.
- Even Satan was perfect until he fell (Ezekiel 28:15).

Often those who teach “once saved, always saved” use the term “eternal security.”

- ***What does the Bible say about that? Nothing!***
- Salvation, eternal life, are always dependent on man’s moment by moment choice – his *free will*.

Those who teach “once saved, always saved” will declare that if one is in apostasy, “they were never saved!” But is that what the Bible says?

- ***“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but **he that endureth to the end shall be saved**”*** (Matthew 10:22; cf. 24:13).
 - This is a conditional warning.
 - If you don’t endure, ***“stay in the faith,”*** you won’t be saved.
 - One can backslide.
- ***“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”*** (Luke 9:62).
 - *Some will “look back.”*
 - In olden times, a person who was plowing had to keep an eye on the point across the field to go in a straight line.
- ***“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times **some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils**”*** (I Timothy 4:1).
 - The Greek means that this issue is explicit. It will happen.
 - Leaving or abandoning the faith means to withdraw far away!
 - They have lost their way, their salvation, which they once had.
- ***“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, **there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins**”*** (Hebrews 10:26).
 - This refers to individuals who had a close walk with Christ and then defy Him, blaspheme Him.
 - They lose their salvation.

- *“But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; **lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.** For we are made partakers of Christ, if **we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end**” (Hebrews 3:13-14).*
 - This is like that enduring-to-the-end verse.
 - It requires a commitment, an effort, continuous submission to what is right.
- *“For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, **after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment** delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (II Peter 2:21-22).*
 - Grotesque illustration
 - One can return to his or her old evil ways.
- *“**Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.... Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life**” (Revelation 2:5, 10).*
 - This is a clear message that one can backslide – a warning given to the Ephesus church. They initially had a true love for God.
 - Return – or your relationship to God will be lost.
- *“And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, **God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book**” (Revelation 22:19).*
 - That’s fearful.
 - If our names are there and they are removed, we’ve lost our salvation.

The parable of the sower reveals that one can lose his or her salvation (Luke 8:12-13). Such stories are repeated over and over.

1. Parable of faithful servant who becomes unfaithful (Luke 12:42-46).
2. Parable of the servant who was forgiven a large debt. His forgiveness was cancelled (Matthew 18:21-35).

Paul’s words: *“Now the just shall live by faith: but **if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him**” (Hebrews 10:38).*

Luke 15:4-7 has a story of one lost sheep. It “strayed from the fold” (the church). The master goes out in a stormy night to rescue this backslider. All heaven rejoices at its rescue.

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever **believeth** [actively following] in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).*

- That everlasting life is part of our eternal hope.
- It will be a gift to the believer – the one who seeks to please God because he really loves Him.
- Pleasing Him means turning away from everything that displeases Him.

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