What Is Salvation?

Millions of professing Christians believe they are “saved.” But from what are they saved?

How and when does salvation take place? Let’s cut through the confusion and understand the truth.

by Noel Hornor

What is salvation? Why do we need it? How do we receive it, and when? If salvation results in everlasting life—as Christianity teaches—what will those who are saved do for all eternity? What is the penalty for those who fail to achieve salvation?

If Christians rely on the Bible for their knowledge of these matters, why do we find so many differing beliefs?

The publishers of The Good News believe the Bible is the revealed Word of God. In this article we see what the Bible teaches about salvation. As we do this, we discover that some popular views aren’t supported in the Scriptures. You should read for yourself what God’s Word teaches on this subject. It is much too important simply to accept what you’ve been told. You need to prove it from the Bible—because your happiness and your eternal life are at stake.

Salvation simply means the act of saving. When used in a religious sense, to save means to rescue someone from the eternal consequences of sin. Everyone needs salvation because, as the Bible tells us, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

How sin began

Sin entered the world with the first man. When God created Adam, He placed him in the Garden of Eden. The garden also included two special trees. The Bible account tells us of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life represented life. If Adam made the right choice, if he chose to eat of the fruit of this tree, he would eventually inherit eternal life. But, if he chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would come under a sentence of death (Genesis 2:17).

The tree of life represented life. If Adam chose to eat from the tree that leads to death (Genesis 3:6). His rebellion against God was sin—and all humanity from that time has repeated Adam’s and Eve’s error.

Through one man sin entered the world, and death and sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned … (Romans 5:12).

Salvation is the act of saving from the penalty of sin, which is death. The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). Salvation makes it possible for believers to live forever in the presence of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Bible explains God’s plan for saving mankind. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, “… from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15, New Revised Standard Version). (If you have not proved for yourself that the Bible is God’s Word, please request our free booklet Is the Bible True?)

How can we receive eternal life?

Eternal life is God’s gift to us. He tells us specifically how we can receive it—“... the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God has no life” (John 5:12). Jesus Himself said: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (John 10:9).

Once we sin and place ourselves under the penalty of death, we can do nothing that will ever free us from the sentence of death. Rather we must receive forgiveness and redemption through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24).

Redemption means to free or buy someone or something by paying a price. It is akin to paying a ransom for someone who has been kidnapped. To redeem humanity, the price that was paid for the sins of mankind had to be greater than the total value of all human life.

Because He was the Son of God who never sinned as well as the very Creator of mankind (Hebrews 4:15; Ephesians 3:9), Christ’s life was of sufficient value to purchase everyone and pay the price for all sins (compare Hebrews 2:9-10).

Sin maintains a claim over us until God redeems us through Jesus’ sacrifice. “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but that of the whole world: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

What must we do?

To have Jesus Christ as your Savior you must acknowledge that you have sinned, that your sins have placed you under a sentence of death and that you need forgiveness through Christ’s sacrifice. You must then accept Jesus as your personal Savior, recognizing that He died for you.

Regrettably, many people stop right there and think that’s all there is to it. They fail to recognize the crucial necessity of personal repentance.

In recognition of Christ’s sacrifice and a desire to receive it, please God, each of us must forsake the sinful ways that

© 2000 United Church of God, an International Association. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. Scriptures in the publication are quoted from the New King James Version © 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers, unless otherwise noted.
The belief that sinners will be conscious in death and confined to hell for eternity is an

**The Bible Really Teach?**

According to the Bible, the soul is what the person

In reality, the Bible does not teach the existence of any kind of eternally continuing

**What Will Salvation Be Like?**

According to the Bible, repentance and

**A life of obedience**

After baptism and our receiving the Spirit of God, we are justified—that is, we become

**The Penalty for Unrepentant Sinners**

D

d Sinners go to hell? God told Adam that if he disobeyed he would come under a

**What is Your Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we will be glorified children of God—though

**When is a Christian saved?**

Is a Christian saved immediately upon baptism? Once you are baptized, have accepted Christ as your Savior and have committed your life to obeying God, are you saved? Is your salvation complete?

According to the Bible, repentance and baptism mark the beginning of the salvation process; the time of a Christian's commitment to continue to serve God. The completion of our salvation, as long as we remain in this physical body, is yet in the future. As the Apostle Paul said, "He who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

Paul wrote, "...Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His love" (Romans 5:9-10). Notice that Paul wrote in the future tense: We will be saved. Our salvation is not complete.

We must endure faithfully to the end of our lives. Or, if we remain alive until Christ returns to earth, we must endure until the time of His coming. If a Christian at some time during his life, after committing to serve God, turns away and renounces Jesus and God's way in word or action, he will lose his salvation—unless he repents of his error. Jesus described such a situation. "... If that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink, and to deal with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites" (Matthew 24:48-51).

"Carnousing with drunkards" can describe the literal behavior of an errant Christian, or it can be a metaphor for evil habits in general. Drunkenness is sometimes used in the Bible to symbolize those who are immersed in the sinful attitudes and practices of the world.

Paul said, "I have made a fall away and even lose salvation. He wrote that in his own life he found it necessary to practice firm self-discipline, guarding against the encroachment of evil. When I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Once we commit our lives to obeying God, the process of being saved has begun in us—although it is still possible for us to fall away (Luke 8:13). Paul said we will be saved if we continue to the end while holding fast the truth preached to us (1 Corinthians 15:2). Our salvation is assured if we do. But our salvation will be complete only at the second coming of Christ—when "He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28).

Salvation—assuring eternal life—will then go to those in the faith who have endured and overcome. Those who are engaged in this spiritual battle need not harbor fears that they will fail to receive eternal life. As we ask for God's help, He will keep us from stumbling (Jude 24). "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Indeed, we can be "confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

**What will salvation be like?**

When Christ returns from heaven and our salvation becomes an eternal reality, what will we be like? What will be the form and appearance of those who receive eternal life? Does the Bible tell us? Indeed it does! "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God" (1 John 3:1). Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2-1).

This may sound incredible, but when our salvation is complete we will have the same glorious appearance as Jesus Christ (see Revelation 1:13-16). Like Him, we will be glorified children of God—though obviously He will forever be greater.

In recent years—with the development of gene therapy, organ transplants and artificial intelligence—some scientists have come to believe that science will someday man a form of immortality. But this is a far-fetched hope at best. Even if such could be accomplished, that sort of existence would be inferior to God's gift of eternal life. God's salvation will provide us an existence that far surpasses anything this present life offers or that scientists can conjure in their wildest hopes. After Jesus died and was resurrected, He entered a new spirit body and appeared to His disciples. We will have a body like Christ's. God "will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body ..." (Philippians 3:21).

Our new bodies will never tire nor grow old. Further, we will have minds that possess the kind of supernatural abilities God has. We will possess greater power than even the greatest saints. We will reign with Christ (Revelation 2:26; 3:21; 5:10) and help bring peace to the world.

We can live forever in God's eternal Kingdom. This is what salvation is. This is what God offers you. God's gift of salvation truly is good news for all.

**Recommended Reading**

This article has only briefly outlined the biblical teachings on repentance, baptism, conversion and salvation. For a deeper understanding of these crucial truths and what God expects you to do, the Bible study booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*, the Bible study booklet *The Road to Eternal Life: The Process of Conversion*, and all others are free for the asking.

Contact any of our offices listed on the back page, or log on and download them from our website at www.gnmagazine.org
The belief that sinners will be conscious in death and confined to hell for eternity is an outgrowth of another erroneous belief—that men possess an immortal soul. Belief in the immortality of the soul was introduced into Judaism as a state of place or condition. Let many people through the ages have believed that the penalty for unrepentant sinners is to suffer for ever and ever in a place of torment. The 18th-century Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards struck fear into the hearts of many by suggesting that God will send sinners to a place of eternal fiery torment as punishment for their sins. As an explanation of where supposedly immortal souls of evil people will spend eternity.

Many religious people now reject this view of hell. Polls show that comparatively few already possess eternal life. The concept of hell as a place of eternal torment developed as an explanation of where supposedly immortal souls of evil people will spend eternity.

In essence, if people believe that man has an immortal soul, they believe that man can sin and still live forever. The Bible says that, through the Holy Spirit, God seals us, His Spirit serving as a guarantee of our salvation, not our present sins against us (Romans 3:25). If we stumble and sin after baptism, we must ask God’s forgiveness so that our salvation is not lost (Luke 21:34). When Jesus said, “He who believes in Me will have eternal life,” He was not promising that all of life will be a joyful experience (John 3:16). When the man persisted in questioning Jesus as to which commandments he must obey, He recited several of the Ten Commandments, which summarize God’s spiritual law. Repentance involves a commitment to live your life in obedience to that law.

According to the Bible, repentance and baptism mark the beginning of the salvation process; the time of a Christian’s commitment to continue to serve God. The completion of our salvation, as long as we remain in this physical world, is yet future, as the future tense. We understand that He who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13). Shortly before He died, Jesus again asked His disciples, “When you have been justified by His blood, you shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His love” (Romans 5:9-10). Notice that Paul wrote in the future tense: We will be saved. Our salvation is not complete.

We must endure faithfully to the end of our lives. Or, if we remain alive until Christ returns to earth, we must endure until the time of His coming. If a Christian at some time during his life, after committing to serve God, turns away and renounces Jesus and God’s way in word or action, he will lose his salvation—unless he repents of his error. Jesus described such a situation: “... if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink and waste his master’s goods” (Matthew 24:48-51). One who lives as Christ lived and whose mind is being transformed to be more like His is one who truly has “the Son” (John 1:12). It is such people who are being saved.

When is a Christian saved?

Is a Christian saved immediately upon baptism? Once you are baptized, have accepted Christ as your Savior and have committed your life to obeying God, are you saved? Is your salvation complete?

Drawn from: Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach? A History of God, 1993, p. 35). Yet many people through the ages have believed that the penalty for unrepentant sinners is to suffer for ever and ever in a place of torment. The 18th-century Puritan preacher Edwards struck fear into the hearts of many by suggesting that God will send sinners to a place of eternal fiery torment as punishment for their sins. As an explanation of where supposedly immortal souls of evil people will spend eternity.

Many religious people now reject this view of hell. Polls show that comparatively few already possess eternal life. The concept of hell as a place of eternal torment developed as an explanation of where supposedly immortal souls of evil people will spend eternity.

In essence, if people believe that man has an immortal soul, they believe that man can sin and still live forever. The Bible says that, through the Holy Spirit, God seals us, His Spirit serving as a guarantee of our salvation, not our present sins against us (Romans 3:25). If we stumble and sin after baptism, we must ask God’s forgiveness so that our salvation is not lost (Luke 21:34). When Jesus said, “He who believes in Me will have eternal life,” He was not promising that all of life will be a joyful experience (John 3:16). When the man persisted in questioning Jesus as to which commandments he must obey, He recited several of the Ten Commandments, which summarize God’s spiritual law. Repentance involves a commitment to live your life in obedience to that law.

According to the Bible, repentance and baptism mark the beginning of the salvation process; the time of a Christian’s commitment to continue to serve God. The completion of our salvation, as long as we remain in this physical world, is yet future, as the future tense. We understand that He who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13). Shortly before He died, Jesus again asked His disciples, “When you have been justified by His blood, you shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His love” (Romans 5:9-10). Notice that Paul wrote in the future tense: We will be saved. Our salvation is not complete.

We must endure faithfully to the end of our lives. Or, if we remain alive until Christ returns to earth, we must endure until the time of His coming. If a Christian at some time during his life, after committing to serve God, turns away and renounces Jesus and God’s way in word or action, he will lose his salvation—unless he repents of his error. Jesus described such a situation: “... if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink and waste his master’s goods” (Matthew 24:48-51). One who lives as Christ lived and whose mind is being transformed to be more like His is one who truly has “the Son” (John 1:12). It is such people who are being saved.

When is a Christian saved?

Is a Christian saved immediately upon baptism? Once you are baptized, have accepted Christ as your Savior and have committed your life to obeying God, are you saved? Is your salvation complete?

D

sinners go to hell? God told Isaiah that He would destroy those who opposed Him in His kingdom of light. But the false prophets of the time accused the people of idolatry and of doing evil. Jesus said, “If a house is divided against itself, then it cannot stand” (Mark 3:25). In the Old Testament, we have the story of the two sons of a husbandman, whose father had divided his inheritance among them. The elder son, blind to the future, went to the fields of the har-
What Is Salvation?

Millions of professing Christians believe they are “saved.” But from what are they saved?

How and when does salvation take place? Let’s cut through the confusion and understand the truth.

by Noel Hornor

What is salvation? Why do we need it? How do we receive it, and when? If salvation results in everlasting life—as Christianity teaches—what will those who are saved do for all eternity? What is the penalty for those who fail to achieve salvation?

If Christians rely on the Bible for their knowledge of these matters, why do we find so many differing beliefs?

The publishers of The Good News believe the Bible is the revealed Word of God. In this article we see what the Bible teaches about salvation. As we do this, we discover that some popular views aren’t supported in the Scriptures. You should read for yourself what God’s Word teaches on this subject. It is much too important to simply accept what you’ve been told. You need to prove it from the Bible—because your happiness and your eternal life are at stake.

Salvation simply means the act of saving. When used in a religious sense, to save means to rescue someone from the eternal consequences of sin. Everyone needs salvation because, as the Bible tells us, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23, 6:23).

How sin began

Sin entered the world with the first man. When God created Adam, He placed him in the Garden of Eden. The garden also included two special trees. The Bible account calls one of them the tree of life and the other the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:8-9).

The tree of life represented life. If Adam made the right choice, if he chose to eat from the fruit of this tree, he would eventually inherit eternal life. But, if he chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would come under a sentence of death (Genesis 2:17).

Why? Something called “the tree of life” obviously had to have good. But why so bad about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

God explained to Adam that He alone knew what was best for humanity. Partaking of the tree of life represented obedience to God, doing what He says is good. Godly obedience would eventually gain for Adam the fruits of eternal life (see also Proverbs 11:30).

The other hand, if Adam disobeyed, as represented by eating of the other tree, his disobedience would amount to deciding right from wrong for himself. This would ultimately result in disaster because human beings, beginning with Adam, have lacked the innate ability to know what is good and what is evil.

As Proverbs 14:12 tells us: “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Human beings are not always able, without God’s instruction, to discern what is God’s will and what is sin (the opposite of God’s will).

The history of the human race illustrates that people have failed miserably at righty discerning between good and bad. We have some ability to distinguish and choose what will benefit us, but we demonstrate serious deficiencies in knowing right from wrong in many crucial areas. This is why the history of humanity is scarred with so much pain. Sin is the cause of suffering. When people reason for themselves what is right, without God’s revelation, the result is a life plagued by the miseries that result from sin.

Adam, responding to Eve’s persuasion, chose to eat from the tree that leads to death (Genesis 3:6). His rebellion against God was sin—and all humanity from that time has repeated Adam’s and Eve’s error.

Through one man sin entered the world, and death and sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned . . .” (Romans 5:12).

Human beings do not usually die immediately after they sin, but they do come under a death sentence at that time. The Bible speaks of two kinds of death—the natural death that everyone experiences (Hebrews 9:27) and “the second death” (Revelation 21:8). The second death is the ultimate result of death. It is the sentence from which we need God to save us.

God wants to save all of humanity. He wants every person to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). “God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, emphasis added in KJV).

The Bible explains God’s plan for saving mankind. As the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “. . . From childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15, New Revised Standard Version). (If you have not proved for yourself that the Bible is God’s Word, please request our free booklet Is the Bible True?)

How can we receive eternal life?

Eternal life is God’s gift to us. He tells us specifically how we can receive it: “... the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (John 5:12). Jesus Himself said: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (John 10:9).

Once we sin and place ourselves under the penalty of death, we can do nothing that will ever free us from the sentence of death. Rather we must receive forgiveness and redemption through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24).

Redemption means to free or buy someone or something by paying a price. It is akin to paying a ransom for someone who has been kidnapped. To redeem humanity, the price that was paid for the sins of mankind had to be greater than the total value of all human life. Because He was the Son of God, who never sinned as well as the very Creator of mankind (Hebrews 4:15; Ephesians 3:9), Christ’s life was of sufficient value to purchase everyone and pay the price for all sins (compare Hebrews 2:9-10).

Sin maintains a claim over us until God redeems us through Jesus’ sacrifice. “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

What must we do?

To have Jesus Christ as your Savior you must acknowledge that you have sinned, that your sins have placed you under a sentence of death and that you need forgiveness through Christ’s sacrifice. You must then accept Jesus as your personal Savior, recognizing that He died for you.

Regrettably, many people stop right there and think that’s all there is to it. They fail to recognize the crucial necessity of personal repentance.

In recognition of Christ’s sacrifice and a desire to please God, each of us must forsake the sinful ways that...