

## The Path to Salvation – Part 2

Rod Reynolds

The Bible teaches that God has a plan of salvation for mankind. What does that mean, and why is a plan of salvation necessary? What is it that human beings need to be saved from? If there is a “plan of salvation,” what is it? Are there specific steps to be followed on the path to salvation?

In a previous article, part one of a series, I addressed the first two of the following questions relating to salvation for human beings:

(1) What is "salvation"?; (2) Are “good” people saved even if they don't know about Christ, or are unbelievers?; (3) Are infants and babies saved, even though they know nothing of Christ and lack the capacity to choose good or evil?; (4) Does the Bible teach “Universal Salvation”?; (5) Who qualifies you for salvation?; (6) Can one, after making a profession of faith in Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit, be disqualified from salvation?; (7) Are those who do not attain salvation in this age eternally condemned?; (8) What is the path to salvation?

In this article, part two of a series, we begin with question number three:

**(3) Are infants and babies saved, even though they know nothing of Christ and lack the capacity to choose good or evil?**

This question is answered in the article titled “What Happens to Those Who Die As Infants?” The article is available on our website, [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org), and is reprinted in the Summer 2021 edition of *Messenger* magazine.

Continuing, let's move on to the next question:

**(4) Does the Bible teach “Universal Salvation”?**

**In this age**, the time since the creation of the first pair of humans, from which all human beings have descended, **few have found and followed the path of salvation**. “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). Yet, the Bible teaches that when all is said and done, **every person** will have ample opportunity for salvation, either in this age or in a future resurrection.

“For, since indeed, through a man, came death, through a man, also cometh the raising of the dead; For, **just as, in the Adam, all die**, so, also, **in the Christ, shall all be made alive**. But, each, in his own rank [order]: – A firstfruit, Christ, after that, they who are the Christ's, in his presence [or at his coming], Afterwards, the end – whensoever he delivereth up the kingdom unto his God and Father, whensoever he shall bring to nought all rule and all authority and power” (I Corinthians 15:21-24, Rotherham translation).

Before “the end,” referred to in the Scripture quoted above, others will be resurrected, who

were not included in the “first resurrection” at the time of Christ’s second coming (cf. Revelation 20:4-5). Jesus said, “Do not be surprised at this: for the time is coming when his voice will come **to all** who are in the place of the dead, And they will come out; those who have done good, into the new life; and those who have done evil, to be judged” (John 5:28-29, Bible in Basic English version). “I have hope in God..., that there will be a **resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust**” (Acts 24:15).

Those who had been deceived in a previous life, will be taught the truth. **“They shall all be taught by God”** (John 6:45). “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books [the books of the **Bible**] **were opened**. And another book **was opened**, which is the **Book of Life** [so they might learn and have an opportunity to be granted eternal life]. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:12). They shall be judged according to the works they do, after having been resurrected and taught the truth.

But the bible also teaches that the incorrigibly wicked – those who refuse to repent though given every reasonable opportunity to do so – will be punished with death in what is called the “second death.” “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And **anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire**” (Revelation 20:14).

“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, **which is the second death**” (Revelation 21:7-8).

These will be burned up like chaff (Matthew 3:12). The incorrigible, who refuse to repent having been given every opportunity to do so, will ultimately be burned up, and will be reduced to ashes (Malachi 4:1, 3). The Bible indicates, however, that fortunately only a minority will wind up making that choice after all is said and done.

For more detailed information on this subject, see our articles available at [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org): “The Truth About Hell,” “What Is Death?” “Lazarus and the Rich Man,” “Are Many or Few Called in this Age?” If you would like to have a printed copy of any of these articles, and do not have the means to print them from our website, contact us to request a printed copy.

### **(5) Can one, after making a profession of faith in Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit, be disqualified from salvation?**

Some have taught the doctrine of “once saved always saved.” The idea is that once you have made a profession of faith in Christ, God is duty bound to save you. You cannot “do” anything beyond professing faith in Christ to affect your salvation, because that would allegedly be “salvation by works.”

The other side of the coin is that you cannot “do” anything to endanger your salvation, either. You might bring temporal wrath upon yourself by sinning after conversion, but you cannot lose your salvation, it is claimed.

Of many who have taught and continue to teach this doctrine, one is a very popular, influential preacher with a worldwide audience, and who has been president of one of the largest Protestant denominations in the United States. He has made the following statements:

“Eternal security [another name for the once saved always saved doctrine] is the work of God in Christ that guarantees that the gift of salvation once received by faith is possessed forever and cannot be lost.”

“Salvation is neither achieved nor maintained by anything we do, and it cannot be lost if we sin” (“Your Convictions About Eternal Security,” Charles Stanley, [www.intouch.org](http://www.intouch.org), retrieved 3-3-18).

Elsewhere it is stated by the same author: “The Bible clearly teaches that God's love for His people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand.” (cited [www.evangelicaloutreach.org/charles-stanley.htm](http://www.evangelicaloutreach.org/charles-stanley.htm), also [faithalone.org/magazine/y1993/93may5.html](http://faithalone.org/magazine/y1993/93may5.html)).

“God does not require a *constant attitude* of faith in order to be saved – only an *act* of faith” ([faithalone.org/magazine/y1993/93may5.html](http://faithalone.org/magazine/y1993/93may5.html), p. 80).

Further down on the same page, Stanley also writes: “You and I are not saved because we have an enduring faith. We are saved because at a moment in time we expressed faith in our enduring Lord.”

Does the Bible teach, in actual fact, that once you have made a profession of faith in Christ you are given salvation unconditionally, and cannot lose it?

One of the Scriptures used to support such doctrine is John 10:28: “And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” But notice the context: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and **they follow Me**” (John 10:27).

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And **the sheep** of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: ‘Do not harden your hearts, as in the **rebellion**, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, And said, “It is a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.” So I swore in My wrath, “**They shall not enter My rest.**”’” (Psalm 95:6-11).

Paul, in the book of Hebrews, quoted this very Psalm 95 in part:

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an **evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God**; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ **if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end**, while it is said: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’ For who, having heard,

rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And **to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?** So we see that they **could not enter** in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:12-19).

"Let us therefore be **diligent** to enter that rest, **lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience**" (Hebrews 4:11).

"Sheep" who don't follow Christ can be lost, and can be devoured.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. **Resist him, steadfast in the faith...**" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Jesus said, "**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed**" (John 8:31).

Jesus also said to his disciples, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. **If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out** as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. **If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you**, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. **If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love**, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15: 5-10).

Paul wrote that a member of the Church who is blatantly living in sin is to be separated from the congregation, that the member may be disciplined, with the hope that he or she will repent: "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now **I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother**, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore 'put away from yourselves the evil person'" (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

God warns us that in judgment he is no respecter of persons. God sent Ezekiel the prophet to tell his people how God would judge them: "O son of man, say to the house of Israel: `Thus you say, "If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?'" Say to them: 'As I live, "says the Lord God," **I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?**' Therefore you, O son of man, say to the children of your people: `The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression; as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall because of it in the day that he turns from his wickedness; nor shall the righteous be able to live because of his righteousness in the day that he sins.' **When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered**; but because of the iniquity that he has committed,

he shall die. Again, **when I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live.** Yet the children of your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' But it is their way which is not fair! **When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it. But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it.** Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, **I will judge every one of you according to his own ways**" (Ezekiel 33:10-20).

Granted this prophecy in Ezekiel is speaking directly of physical death as God's punishment for rebellion against his commandments under the Old Covenant. But it goes beyond that. The same principle applies in the New Covenant, and the punishment of the **"second death,"** from which there will be no resurrection (cf. Revelation 2:11; 20:14-15). "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the **second death**" (Revelation 21:8).

"And do not fear those who **kill the body but cannot kill [or destroy] the soul [life]**. But rather fear Him who is able to **destroy both soul and body in hell** [Gehenna, the lake of fire]" (Matthew 10:28). Only God has the authority to make a complete and permanent end of life for human beings. "...there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39; see our articles "The Truth About Hell," and "What Is Death?" for further explanation).

The Apostle Paul wrote, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become **disqualified**" (1 Corinthians 9: 27).

"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight – **if indeed you continue in the faith,** grounded and **steadfast,** and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister" (Colossians 1: 21-23).

The Church is warned, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction" (II Peter 2:1-2).

And continuing: "They have **forsaken the right way** and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, **for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.** For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, **the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.** While they promise them liberty, they themselves are

slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, **after they have escaped** the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are **again** entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is **worse** for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, **to turn from the holy commandment** delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'" (II Peter 2:15-22).

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, **beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked**" (II Peter 3:14-17).

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "**I know your works**, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for **I have not found your works perfect before God**. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast and repent**. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. **He who overcomes** shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not **blot out his name from the Book of Life**; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels'" (Revelation 3:1-5).

"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore **by their fruits you will know them**. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does the will of My Father in heaven**. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied **in Your name**, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; **depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!**' Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and **does them**, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and **does not do them**, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall" (Matthew 7:19-27).

"... do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself **wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life** to those who by **patient continuance in doing good** seek for glory,

honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and **do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath**, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who **works what is good**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. **For there is no partiality with God**” (Romans 2:4-11).

We are warned, “For if we sin willfully after we have received the [full] knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26-27). Or, as in the Weymouth translation of the New Testament: “For if we wilfully persist in sin after having received the full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains in reserve any other sacrifice for sins. There remains nothing but a certain awful expectation of judgement, and the fury of a fire which before long will devour the enemies of the truth” (Hebrews 10:26-27).

Those who will be with Christ after his coming are “called, chosen, **and faithful**” (Revelation 17:14).

The above are just some of the Scriptures that belie the “Once Saved Always Saved” doctrine, also called the “Eternal Security” doctrine.

It may seem easier and is certainly more popular to tell people that they can willfully sin with impunity if they have once professed faith in Christ. And perhaps it may cause some who lack understanding to feel more secure. But if so, it is a **false security**. I would do you no service to tell you otherwise.

Yes, even faithful Christians sin on occasion. There are notable examples of such in the Bible, including such people of faith as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Moses, David, Peter, as well as others. Overcoming human nature is a constant challenge every Christian must face throughout this lifetime. But when one does sin out of the weakness of the flesh, he should immediately repent. “He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever **confesses and forsakes them** will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

No one, however, regardless of what the person professes, can become or remain a true Christian if he or she deliberately continues to live a life of sin, or disregard for the commandments of God.

The Apostle John wrote: “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who **practices righteousness** is righteous, just as He is righteous” (I John 3:7). As A. T. Robertson explains in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, the meaning of the Greek translated in the New King James version “He who practices righteousness” is “He that **keeps on doing** righteousness.”

John went on to write, “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8). As Robertson explains, “He who sins,” according to the Greek text means “He that **keeps on** doing sin’ (the habit of sin).” Robertson comments, “When one acts like the devil he shows that he is not a true child of God” from a spiritual standpoint.

**(6) Are those who do not attain salvation in this age eternally condemned?**

The true biblical answer to this question is not at all what most professing Christian churches have taught. We have published on our website, [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org), an article covering this question titled: "Are the 'Lost' Predestined to Hell?" It is reprinted in the Summer 2021 edition of *Messenger* magazine.

Another important question relating to salvation is:

**(7) Who qualifies you for salvation?**

None of us can qualify himself for salvation. We do not become qualified for salvation because we are better than other people or because we deserve it, or because of our own righteousness. We are all sinners, and are justly worthy of death.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

"For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

"Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one'" (Romans 3:9-10).

So then, if we are justly condemned as sinners, who can qualify us for salvation? I remember years ago, it was a common idea within the Church of God fellowship that I belonged to at the time, that we had to "qualify for salvation."

Now there are certain things we must do, if we are to be granted salvation. And we will discuss these things before the end of this series of articles. But nothing we do, of itself, could ever qualify us for salvation. You should never think that you can ever, of your own goodness and righteousness, qualify yourself for salvation.

Your deeds can **disqualify** you for salvation, but of themselves they can never qualify you.

"But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become **disqualified**" (I Corinthians 9:27).

"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are **disqualified**" (II Corinthians 13:5).

**Only God can qualify us for salvation.** Paul, writing to the Church in Colosse (also spelled Colossae), said he prayed:

"...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the **Father who has**



**qualified us [or who qualifies us]** to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered [or delivers] us from the power of darkness and conveyed [or conveys] us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:10-14).

Notice that Paul in his statement did not leave out the necessity of walking in a worthy manner, nor did he leave out being fruitful in good works, and increasing in the knowledge of God. Although these things are necessary for a Christian, what qualifies us for salvation in the first place is God forgiving us of our sins, and redeeming us by the blood of Jesus Christ, which pays the penalty for our sins, so that we may be justly forgiven.

We are powerless to qualify ourselves for salvation. We could live what some might call a “good life,” do all sorts of good works, etc., but none of that would qualify us for salvation, because we would still be under the condemnation of the death penalty for the sins we have committed, without God acting to forgive us, to justify us, to sanctify us, to qualify us for salvation.

So it is God who qualifies us for salvation, not we ourselves. But having been qualified, we must remain qualified, as we will see. There is an initial stage of salvation, where we stand before God as cleansed, and no longer guilty in his eyes. But salvation is also a process, that has multiple stages, or steps.

What are the steps, exactly how does the process work? So we come again to the question: What is the path of salvation? And we plan to cover that final question in the next and final article in our series, “The Path to Salvation.”

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