

The Path To Salvation—Part 3

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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 previous articles, parts one and two of a series, I addressed the first seven 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 three of this series, we conclude the final question: “What is the path to salvation?”

The Scriptures do reveal a definite path to salvation. And as with any path there are steps along the way that are necessary to get you to the final destination.

To repeat: Ultimate and final salvation is a process, it is a path we must follow. So what is the path?

(1) First, to have salvation one must **hear the gospel**. By using the term “hear” the gospel, we also include learning of the gospel by the printed word. Whether you hear it with your ears, or read it, you are getting the same message. But without the gospel, the message of the gospel, the knowledge contained in the gospel, one cannot be saved.

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’” (Romans 10:14-15).

“So then **faith comes by hearing**, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

As we will explore further as we proceed, faith is essential to salvation, but without hearing there is no faith. Hearing is a first and necessary step in the process of salvation.

Jesus came preaching a message. As he did he trained others to continue on after his death to preach the same message. Then after his resurrection, he appeared to them with the following instructions: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

Note that they were sent to preach, or proclaim a message to the entire world. The hearing of the gospel message is essential to the process of salvation because it is through that message that vital information necessary for salvation is taught.

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus:

“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their **understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them**, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you **have heard Him and have been taught by Him**, as the truth is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4: 17-21).

Note that after the word is proclaimed people who receive it and act on it in faith are added to the body of believers, that is, those who are enrolled in heaven as part of the Church of God, whose names are written in the book of life.

“However, many of those who **heard the word believed**; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

We see again in Acts 10, how Peter was sent to bring the message of salvation to a group of Gentiles:

“So Cornelius [a Centurion, an officer in the Roman army] said [to Peter], ‘Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, **he will speak to you.**’ So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, **to hear all the things commanded you by God.**’ Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—**that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea**, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And **He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify** that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins. While **Peter was still speaking these words**, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (Acts 10:30-44).

Note that the message Peter brought, which added to knowledge of the Scriptures the people in the audience had already gained, led to their conversion.

Note how this is characterized in the next chapter: “Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea **heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God**” (Acts 11:1).

They had to hear, to be exposed to the word of God, the gospel message, in order to receive it.

“Of His own will He brought us forth [generated us spiritually] **by the word of truth**, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures (James 1:18).

The word of God is at the foundation of our spiritual regeneration, of our salvation.

John wrote: “... that which we have seen and heard **we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us**; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

So the **first step** on the path of salvation is **hearing the word of God**. God himself has initiated and sustains this effort to communicate the message of salvation to mankind. God is the source of the message, and he is the one who manages its communication to the world.

But, just hearing not enough.

(2) When one hears the message, for it to bear fruit in terms of salvation for the one who hears, **he must believe**. What is it that he must believe? He must believe the testimony of the Scripture, which is what the gospel is, in its largest sense. And he must believe not only the message, but he must **believe in the one** who is the source of the message, the one in whose hands is life and death, salvation or destruction.

“**In Him** you also trusted, **after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed**, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13).

“... as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because **when you received the word of God** which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, **the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe**” (1 Thessalonians 2:11-13).

Israel in the wilderness **heard the same gospel**, but they **did not believe** it, so they failed in their calling, and were denied entrance into the promised land, which is a type of the kingdom of God.

“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 3:16-19).

"For indeed the gospel was preached to us **as well as to them**; but **the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith** in those who heard it" (Hebrews 4:2).

Faith is a gift, but to receive that gift requires a heart and mind ready and willing to receive it. Upon hearing the message, believing or rejecting it is a decision the hearer makes. It is a matter of what one chooses to do with the word that is spoken, or communicated.

That doesn't make it any less a gift. If someone is offering you a gift, you can accept it or reject it. It works that way with pretty much any kind of gift. And that's the way it is with faith. When God sends the message, he is offering with it the gift of faith, but it's up to each individual whether to believe or not believe.

If faith is a gift, which it is, but if there is no choice in the matter, why doesn't God give everyone faith? If humans have no free will, no choice in the matter, and some are given faith and others are not, then God is a respecter of persons. Yet, we are assured, "There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality..." (II Chronicles 19:7). "For there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:11).

A gift can be accepted or refused. The gospel can be rejected or believed. If you choose to believe, and God grants you faith ("from faith to faith") as a result of your belief, it's no less a gift.

"For 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**; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17).

To one who has a ready mind to believe, God grants the faith necessary for salvation. But if one's mind is hardened, and refuses to believe, he cuts himself off from being able to receive the gift God holds out to him.

"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were **more fair-minded** than those in Thessalonica, in that they **received the word with all readiness**, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. **Therefore many of them believed**, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men" (Acts 17:10-12).

Note that the willingness to receive the word with a ready mind, a willingness to consider and search out the truth of it, led to saving faith, for many in Berea.

On the other hand, when Paul preached the gospel to a group of Jews, along with Gentiles, in Antioch of Pisidia (western Asia Minor, in what is today Turkey), many of the Jews rejected it out of envy:

“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with **envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul**. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the **word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it**, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’” (Acts 13: 44-46).

“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 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. For with the heart one **believes unto righteousness**, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame’” (Romans 10:8-11).

But the confession spoken of is not and the faith spoken of here is not an empty and fruitless, superficial confession and belief, but a **belief unto righteousness**. A belief, or faith, which **leads to profound changes in how one thinks and lives his life!**

(3) The next step on the path to salvation is **repentance**.

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. **Repent, and believe in the gospel**’” (Mark 1:14-15).

What did Jesus mean, when he commanded the hearers of the message to repent?

Some claim repentance is a change of mind, but not a change of behavior. That it does not mean that one must quit sinning.

Note the following from an article “The Woeful Curse Of Lordship Salvation” (David J. Stewart, www.jesusisprecious.org): “There is a woeful heresy which has crept into many churches today, teaching that carnal believers are not saved. The heresy is called ‘Lordship Salvation,’ which says that in order to be saved a person must forsake sinful behavior....”

“...the damnable heresy of LORDSHIP SALVATION has infiltrated many religious groups and is leading multitudes into Hell.”

“Again, Lordship Salvation is the unbiblical teaching that a person **MUST** cease from a sinful lifestyle to be saved. Lordship Salvationists pervert the true meaning of the word “REPENT” in the Word of God. Whereas Biblical *repentance* simply means “to change one's mind,” Lordship Salvationists corrupt the meaning of the word, teaching that a person must cease from living a sinful lifestyle to be saved.”

“All we have to do to be saved is to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ as payment for our sins. The “Gospel” (Good News) is that Christ **DIED** on the cross for our sins, He was

BURIED, and then bodily RESURRECTED three days later (1st Corinthians 15:1-4). Simply BELIEVE the Gospel and the work is done!”

“The Greek word for 'repentance'... is 'METANOIA' and literally means 'a change of mind.' Not a change of lifestyle; BUT, a change of mind.”

“I have read many Gospel tracts that give the impression that a person MUST forsake their sins to be saved, which is NOT true at all. A person DOES need to repent to be saved, but the ONLY repentance which God requires of a man to be saved is for that man to acknowledge his sinful condition and recognize his desperate need for a Savior....”

The statements quoted above represent a common belief among many professing churches. Is it any wonder that so many people who profess to be Christians live lives little different from others around them who make no such profession?

How does the Bible itself actually define repentance? Does repentance mean one just undergoes a “change of mind” to accept Jesus as savior, but there is no requirement to change his behavior?

It is true that the Greek word for repentance means to change one's mind. The Greek word for repentance, *μετάνοια*, (*metanoia*) comes from a verb, *metanoéō*, which means to think differently. But what does that imply, from a Scriptural perspective?

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’” (Matthew 3:1).

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance**, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore **every tree which does not bear good fruit** is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:7-12).

The implication of this is that **if one does not bear the fruits of repentance, he has not truly repented**. It does indeed involve a change of mind, but **if you undergo a genuine change of mind, your behavior will change with it**.

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. **These are the things which defile a man**” (Matthew 15:19-20).

Those who teach that repentance does not involve forsaking sins, select a few Scriptures from the Bible and then pervert them to teach a damnable doctrine that deceives people into a false conversion. It takes them on a path that will never lead to salvation.

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, But **whoever confesses and forsakes them** will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

Paul described his mission to King Agrippa (ruler of Palestine): "...but [I] declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and **do works befitting repentance**" (Acts 26:20).

We find the **Bible's definition of repentance** stated in Ezekiel 18, among other places:

“Again, when a wicked man **turns away from the wickedness which he committed**, and **does what is lawful and right**, he preserves himself alive. Because he **considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed**, he shall surely live; he shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, “The way of the Lord is not fair.” O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair? Therefore **I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways**,’ says the Lord God. ‘**Repent, and turn from all your transgressions**, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. **Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed**, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord God, ‘**Therefore turn and live!**’” (Ezekiel 18:27-32).

“But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, **did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts**” (Revelation 9:20-21).

So we see that repentance, from the Bible's perspective, very definitely means a change of lifestyle. It means acting on your belief, confessing your sins and turning from sin.

The next step on the path to salvation is:

(4) **Baptism.**

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. **He who believes and is baptized will be saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16).

Baptism is an outward confession of your faith and repentance. It implies that you become a new creature, that you enter into a newness of life in Christ, having died to your sins.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! **How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?** Or do you not know that as many of us as

were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also **should walk in newness of life**. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that **we should no longer be slaves of sin**" (Romans 6:1-6).

We have an article available titled "Should You Be Baptized?," which goes into much greater detail concerning baptism.

The next step on the path to salvation is:

(5) Receive the Holy Spirit.

When Peter and others preached in the Temple on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, some who were there were convicted, and we read:

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, '**Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**'" (Acts 2:37-38).

The Spirit of God is given to those who repent, and thus are committed to obedience to God's word, his laws.

"Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you" (Proverbs 23:23).

When Peter spoke to Jewish leaders in the early days of the Church, he spoke to them of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and said to them: "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom [which] God has given [better translated "gives"] to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

Obedience to God's laws, his commandments, involves an act of will, coupled with the power of God's Spirit. Humans have will, and choice, and God holds humans accountable for their choices and their behavior.

If obedience is without any effort or choice on our part, but simply the working of God without any act of will on our part, what justification is there for God to punish sin? But even though we must choose to do what God requires of us, to follow through and actually accomplish it requires the help of God's Spirit, which he makes available to us, as we seek it.

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13).

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, **who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit**. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ

Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, **that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** For those who live according to the flesh **set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.** For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:1-6).

(6) After hearing, believing, repenting, being baptized, and receiving the Holy Spirit, **we must continue to bring forth the fruits of righteousness (overcoming the flesh, the world, Satan)**

“As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, **‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed’**” (John 8:30-31).

Jesus said to his disciples: **“Abide in Me, and I in you.** As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 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**” (John 15:4-6).

“I say then: **Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.** For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16-25).

“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:8).

(7) In addition to the above, to attain final salvation we must **endure to the end.**

“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).

“Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. **Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If**

what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life” (1 John 2:23-25).

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **holding fast the word of life**, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain” (Philippians 2:12-16).

In the Olivet prophecy Jesus foretold many things that would happen leading up to the end of the age. He said, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. **But he who endures to the end shall be saved**" (Matthew 24:12-13).

Here we've rehearsed seven steps to salvation. Of course, this is a bare outline, and many more details could be discussed. The steps are: (1) Hear God's word; (2) Believe the gospel; (3) Repent; (4) Be baptized; (5) Receive the Holy Spirit; (6) Bring forth fruits of righteousness; (7) Endure to the end.

You would do well to remember these, study them thoroughly, and walk the path to salvation.

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