

your most important possession

As Christians, all of us have things that are meaningful and valuable to us--our families, health, jobs, houses, hobbies--the list goes on. But there is one possession all believers have that is infinitely more important than any of these things. This "pearl of great price" is the gift of eternal membership in the family of the living God with all the privileges that go with it.

In "Your Most Important Decision," the first lesson of the SEARCH BASIC DISCIPLESHIP booklet, we reviewed the things a person has to know and believe to be a Christian. There we presented the four basic elements of the gospel as: God's position, man's condition, God's provision, and man's decision. In this booklet we will explore the riches of the good news of salvation in greater depth.

the reason for salvation

God's Position

The Scriptures portray God not only as holy, just, and righteous, but also as loving and kind. He created man in His image (see Gen. 1:26-27) with the spiritual capacity to communicate and have fellowship with Him. Man was designed to receive and display God's life and love to all creation.

Because of this, mankind is highly significant. The God of all creation is committed to our joy and always acts for our benefit. When we respond to His love, God is glorified and His children are satisfied.

1. Why didn't God avoid the problem of sin, suffering, and hell by creating us so that we would not sin?
2. Why does God want to be glorified?

Man's Condition

Mankind is highly significant but deeply fallen. God's originally perfect creation included flawless creatures with a spiritual and moral capacity. In the garden, they were given the ability to choose, so that their relationship with God would be meaningful and not mechanical. But choice always involves responsibility, and they were warned of the consequences of the improper choice of disobeying God (Gen. 2:16-17).

1. The Origin of Sin

In spite of God's warning and the richness of their relationship with Him, they fell into sin by choosing their own will over God's (Gen. 3:6). Mysteriously, beings who were created moral and rational succumbed to the immorality and irrationality of sin. An inward aspiration in their desire to be as God led to outward actions in their denial of God. The consequences of sin were heavy: "in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17; see Rom. 6:23 and Jas. 1:15). This included both physical (Gen. 3:19) and spiritual (Eph. 2:1-3) death. Spiritual death is separation from God, and this is the inheritance of every one of Adam's descendants (Rom. 5:12). Because we were born with a sin nature, we "were by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3).

- a. In what ways were the angelic and human falls similar? (See Ezek. 28:12-19.)
- b. What were the immediate results of the fall of man? (See Gen. 3:14-19,24.)
- c. How did Adam's action affect the rest of humanity? (See Rom. 5:12-19.)

2. The Meaning of Sin

The Old and New Testaments use a variety of words to describe the different dimensions of sin. Some of these words can be translated "evil," "rebellion," "going astray," "iniquity," "transgression," "trespass," "lawlessness," "impurity," and "ungodliness." Negatively, sin is missing the mark; positively, it is hitting the wrong mark. All sin ultimately relates to God as a denial of His character. The Bible speaks of personal sin, original sin, and imputed sin.

--Personal sins are the sins we individually commit.

--Original sin refers to the sin nature we inherited from Adam. Sin (the sin nature) leads to sins (personal sin). We sin because we are sinners, not vice versa.

--Imputed sin is the result of our participation in the first sin. Adam's sin was placed on our account ("through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men," Rom. 5:18).

3. The Consequences of Sin

Sin led to consequences in every area. In relation to God, joy and fulfillment were replaced by shame and fear. Man's relationship with God was severed, and he was placed under the condemnation and wrath of God. (God's wrath is not selfish passion like a parent losing his temper and lashing out against a child. Rather, it is the response of His holy and loving character to the disastrous effects of wickedness.) In relation to self, sin led to loss of true life and identity. In relation to others, sin degraded human relationships on every level. In relation to creation, sin had repercussions on the whole of nature because of the curse (see Gen. 3:14-19 and Rom. 8:19-22).

- a. Describe man as the Bible sees him in his natural human state. (See Isa. 59:1-2; Eph. 2:1-3.)
- b. Is man a sinner by nature, by his actions, or by both? (See Mark 7:21-23; Rom. 5:12-19; Gal. 5:19-21; Titus 3:3.)
- c. What does the term "death" mean in John 5:24 and Romans 6:23?

4. Human Solutions for Sin

The problem of sin, guilt, and separation from God has led to many religious efforts to restore the lost relationship with God. The religions of the world represent variations on the same theme of salvation by human works.

- a. Why can't a person who is morally good make it on his own merit? (See Rom. 3:20,23; 4:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5.)
- b. What are God's requirements for man to establish a personal

relationship with Him? (See Matt. 5:48; Jas. 2:10.)

- c. Why is the death of Christ as our substitute necessary? (See Rom. 3:9-23; 5:6-11.)

God's Provision

Man is highly significant, deeply fallen, but greatly loved. God's love for humanity caused Him to send Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, into the world to deliver us from the bondage and penalty of sin (John 3:16; 14:6). Fully God, Jesus also took on human form and became fully man (John 1:1-3,14-18; Phil. 2:5-9; Col. 2:9). He identified with the human condition, lived a perfect life (Heb. 4:14-15; 1 John 3:5), offered His life for ours upon the cross, and as our sinbearer endured the judgment of God on our behalf (Rom. 5:6-10; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). Thus He removed the barrier of sin that separated man from God and in His glorious resurrection forever conquered death (Rom. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15). Because of Christ's work, God can offer us the gift of forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13-14) and eternal life with Him (Rom. 6:23).

There is a great difference between human religion and a divine relationship. The former is what man tries to do for God; the latter is what God has done for man. The first would achieve by behaving; the second receives by believing. Righteousness is a gift, not a work. It means to conform perfectly to a standard, in this case, the character of God. When we receive the righteousness of Christ, we are removed from a position of death and condemnation as members of the first Adam's family and placed in a position of life and glorification as members of the family of the second Adam (see Rom. 5:12-21).

Instead of personal sin, God opens up the way for personal righteousness in Christ; in contrast to the sin nature in Adam, we have been given a new nature in Christ; and the imputed sin of Adam's offense has been overcome by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

1. What attribute of God is displayed in 2 Peter 3:9?
2. What qualities separate Christ from all other men including the founders of the non-Christian religions? (See Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 4:14-15.)
3. What is the major difference between Christianity and all other religions? (See 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18.)
4. What cardinal fact of Christianity assures us that Christ's death was not in vain? (See 1 Cor. 15:12-22.)
5. In relation to sin, what is the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian? (See Rom. 6:23; Eph. 1:7.) What is the basis for forgiveness?

The Response to Salvation

It is crucial for people to understand the process God has established to bring them into a right relationship with Him. The Bible clearly teaches that no one could ever achieve or merit salvation through his own efforts and good works (see Eph. 2:8,9; Titus 3:5.).

Man's Decision

Because it is a gift, God's offer of salvation must be received. This requires a decision on our part to respond in faith by trusting in Christ and in Him alone for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 16:31)

Faith is not defined as a lack of doubt, but as a decision based on evidence. Jesus told His disciples, "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves" (John 14:11). If His unique teachings and claims were not enough, He asked them to look at His unique works. His greatest sign is His resurrection from the dead, and this still remains a powerful evidence that He is who He claimed to be. But faith is more than intellectual assent; it is personal reception. God does not call us merely to believe a set of doctrines but to trust in a person.

the results of salvation

Many wonderful things happen to a person when he or she becomes a Christian. Look up the following verses and write down what they say about who we are and what we have in Christ:

JOHN 10:10--

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17--

EPHESIANS 1:3--

COLOSSIANS 1:13-14--

List the three promises in JOHN 5:24--

There are several biblical terms which describe the results of Christ's work in the

RESULTS life of a Christian. Please fill in this chart to broaden your understanding of the

effects of Christ's death on your behalf.

Term	Dictionary Definition	Biblical Usage	Personal Impact
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Try to visualize someone else

SUBSTITUTION

taking the punishment you
(Rom. 5:6-8;
deserve. How do you say
2 Cor. 5:21.)
Thank you" for such a gift?"

REDEMPTION

Write out as many advantages
(Matt. 20:28;
of belonging to Christ as you
Rom. 3:24.)
can.

PROPITIATION

How can you be sure that God
is satisfied with the death
(Rom. 3:25-26;
of His Son on your behalf?
6:23.)
What is the basis for your
assurance that you are in a
right relationship with God?

JUSTIFICATION

Are you righteous now or will
(Rom. 3:24;
you be righteous only in
5:1.)
heaven?

RECONCILIATION

Why were you in need of rec-
(Rom. 5:10;
onciliation? What does it

2 Cor. 5:18-20.)

mean to you to be reconciled?

SALVATION--The biblical concept of salvation is in two directions: we have been saved from the judgment of God and the dominion of sin. We have been saved to a new position, a holy life, and an entrance into God's presence (heaven). The three tenses of salvation are past (saved from sin's penalty--complete deliverance from the judgment of God; Gal. 3:13), present (saved from sin's power--progressive deliverance from the dominion of sin; Rom. 6), and future (saved from sin's presence--final deliverance from the presence of sin; Phil. 3:20-21).

SUBSTITUTION--Christ took our place on the cross and gave His life for our life (Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24). Read Isaiah 53:4-6.

REDEMPTION--God sent His Son to restore us to the fullest dimension of who we were created to be. Redemption is not only deliverance from a curse (negative), but also movement into a larger sphere of life (positive). Christ paid the ransom price of sin by purchasing us out of our slavery to sin and forever setting us free from the penalty of sin (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7). We have been redeemed into a new ownership; Christ is our new Master. Just as Jesus gave Himself for us, now we must give ourselves to Him.

PROPITIATION--This word means to appease or satisfy a demand. Because of His holy and righteous character, God cannot overlook sin. God's wrath against the sin of mankind was appeased by the death of His Son on the cross and His just demands were satisfied (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

JUSTIFICATION--God declares that all who are in Christ are righteous in His sight. When we trusted Christ, we received His righteousness and became acceptable to the Father (Gal. 2:16; Titus 3:5-7).

RECONCILIATION--Jesus overcame our state of alienation from God. We who were formerly God's enemies were radically changed through the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20).

The following chart illustrates the primary focal point of each of these terms.

They depict the various aspects of our salvation in Christ:

[Use the chart on page 5a including the review below it.]

the reassurance of salvation

Can we really be certain of our salvation, or must we be plagued by doubts and questions? The Scriptures tell us that we can be sure of our eternal destiny.

There are two major witnesses to the security we have in Christ; the first is internal, and the second is external.

The Internal Witness

According to the following verses, what is this internal witness, and what effect does it have?

ROMANS 8:14-16--

1 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16--

1 JOHN 2:3-6--

1 JOHN 3:14,18-23--

1 JOHN 3:24; 4:13--

The External Witness (the Scriptures)

Find the following passages that relate to the security of your salvation in Christ and paraphrase each one of them:

JOHN 5:24--

JOHN 6:37,44--

JOHN 10:27-29--

ROMANS 8:29-30--

ROMANS 8:38-39--

EPHESIANS 1:4,13-14--

EPHESIANS 4:30--

2 TIMOTHY 1:12--

1 PETER 1:3-4--

1 JOHN 5:11-13--

There are three little assurance words in Scripture that we should know:

1. ARE (Gal. 4:7; 1 John 3:1)
2. HAS (John 5:24; 1 John 5:11)
3. KNOW (1 John 3:14; 5:13)

The verses we have just studied are clear and simple. There is an important principle of Bible study which says that we should understand clear passages on a doctrine before we go on to interpret more difficult passages. The latter should always be interpreted in light of the former. This principle is especially important to observe when studying passages that relate to the security of the believer.

Below are five of the unclear passages on the subject of salvation and our security. In the space provided, write your interpretation of these verses:

JOHN 15:6--

GALATIANS 5:4--

HEBREWS 6:4-6--

JAMES 2:14-26--

2 PETER 2:20-22--

Be sure to use the Scripture memory cards at the end of this booklet to learn these important verses on salvation: John 1:12; 10:10; 14:6; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-10; Isaiah 53:6; Revelation 3:20.

recurrent questions about salvation

Baptism

1. What is the distinction between water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit? (See Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13.)
2. Water baptism is an important outward sign of your inward commitment, but it is not a condition for salvation. How many

conditions for salvation are listed in the following passages, and what are they?

LUKE 23:40-43--

JOHN 1:12--

JOHN 6:29--

ACTS 16:31--

3. What is your understanding of how the following passages relate to baptism and salvation?

MARK 16:16--

ACTS 2:38--

1 PETER 3:21--

4. What is the purpose of water baptism? Please express this in your own words.
5. Based on the following verses, how do you believe a Christian should respond to water baptism?

MATTHEW 3:13-17--

MATTHEW 28:19--

ACTS 16:33--

Election

1. God has sovereign control over all things. Note what these passages tell us about God's sovereignty:

ACTS 13:48--

ROMANS 8:29-30--

EPHESIANS 1:4-5,11--

1 PETER 1:1-2--

2. Man has been granted the ability and the responsibility to make choices that have real consequences. Please state briefly what these verses say about this ability (free will):

JEREMIAH 18:7-10--

JOHN 3:16-18--

ACTS 2:21--

ROMANS 10:9-13--

3. How do we put these two truths together?
 - a. God is loving (1 John 4:8).
 - b. God is wise (Rom. 11:33).
 - c. God is just (Rom. 3:4-6).
 - d. God's plan is not the same as His desires (1 Tim. 2:4).
 - e. God's plan includes His legitimate response to the actions resulting from the exercise of our free choices (Exod. 32:14).

Divine sovereignty and human responsibility is a both/and rather than an either/or. This is a mystery, and the only way to keep the biblical balance is to maintain the tension between both of these truths.

reflections

1. Who are you in Christ? Describe in your own words your present standing before God.
2. How does your present position relate to your everyday life and problems?
3. Reflect upon your previous identity in Adam (consider the implications of personal, original, and imputed sin) and contrast this with your new identity in Christ (consider the implications of personal and imputed righteousness and the characteristics of the "new self" in Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:9-10).
4. Meditate on the meaning of salvation, substitution, redemption, propitiation, justification, and reconciliation, and thank God for each of these realities in your life.
5. Read Colossians 3:1-17 once a day for the next week. Notice how Paul integrates position and practice, and seek to be more conscious of your position in Christ throughout the day so that it will have a greater impact on your practice.

Scripture memory cards

John 1:12; 10:10; 14:6; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-10; Isaiah 53:6; Revelation 3:20.