



Accents & Issues

Salvation

In our natural condition, we are far away from God's saving presence (Is. 59). But then, by God's gracious gift, we are put right with God through the faithfulness of Jesus on the cross. That is salvation. Salvation does not come about by hoping that our sin will go away, but through the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus, God cleanses the sinner. All of life is transformed.

When God saves us, we are also "baptized by the Holy Spirit." Normally, the evidence of our salvation is a "heart-warming experience." However, the more important evidence of our new life is our commitment to Jesus as Lord. Therefore, salvation has a twofold character, a saving from sin and a saving to abundant life.

So, salvation means deliverance from sin into the safety of God's Kingdom where one will have life in its fullness (John 10:10). Indeed, salvation is a lifelong experience and process. There are evil forces at work to cripple us spiritually. For this reason Jesus taught us to pray two fundamental requests in the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us," and "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:12-13). We pray in the confidence that God can and will deliver us, but his deliverance is associated with discipleship in our daily lives as we strive to serve others and not merely to satisfy ourselves.

One cannot be a Christian alone, but they are part of the body of Christ. We believe that person who comes to God then lives an abundant life in relationship to brothers and sisters in the Church. Christians carry each other's burdens to fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

Among many Christians, salvation is limited to justification, sanctification, and glorification. Justification is God's way of putting people right with himself (Rom. 3:20-21). Sanctification is the experience and process of becoming holy (2 Cor. 7:1). Glorification is the status we receive upon entering God's heavenly Kingdom (Rom. 2:7).

We believe that salvation begins with regeneration (Tit. 3:5). A believer is not simply declared to be right with God, but made new (2 Cor. 5:17). Regeneration is a divine act by the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8) through the name and power of Jesus. The work of Jesus for our salvation is clear: Salvation is found in no one else, "for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). As evidence of one's salvation, a regenerate person, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, bears witness to what has happened and has a sincere desire for others to have the same experience (Rom. 10:1). Through salvation one becomes a truly changed person with a changed character and behavior.

Although our stories of salvation are different, for each of us, regeneration leads to discipleship. Jesus' instruction to his disciples becomes ours: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). This commitment to discipleship means living the Jesus way in all of one's life.

Followers of Jesus who stress obedience and discipleship, when encountering difficult life decisions, ask: "What would Jesus do?" While Christians should not be legalistic and judgmental in applying this principle, it is important to avoid sin and live a holy life. Perhaps the most dangerous sinful practices are rooted in power, lust, and greed. Quest for power leads to sexism, racism, and even pride in our own righteousness. Lust is the downfall of many who have the potential to do great things for God. Greed causes many to use the resources that God has blessed them with for their own enrichment. The temptations of power, lust, and greed are universal and undermine the life of discipleship.

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Yet the journey of faith is different for each person. Some may struggle with pornography, others with feelings of envy and hatred, and still others with the materialistic need to accumulate money and possessions. God's Spirit empowers us to conquer these temptations.

Nevertheless, discipleship entails total commitment and a lifelong following of Jesus under the cross. So, Jesus says: "the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22). We have help of the highest order in this continuation of salvation: Jesus "is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25).

Moreover, whoever believes in Jesus is promised eternal life. Eternal life defines a quality of life, which continues forever. This is the life of God, which also is the life of God's people. On our own, we are quite incapable of experiencing that life, but faith in Jesus makes it possible. By his Spirit, Jesus works a true change in the quality of our lives, which begins now, not in the heavenly future.

As the New Testament speaks of salvation, it encompasses deliverance from darkness, sin, and death; it also includes deliverance to a life of obedience. And so, for the Brethren in Christ, "salvation" is a comprehensive term, which incorporates individual experience, as well, the relationships, life situations, and service that flow from the new life in God.

