

04: SALVATION



WHAT IS SALVATION?

Salvation is defined as deliverance by God from God and His wrath (Romans 5:9-10). God is holy and righteous and our sins against Him cause His wrath to burn against us, which can continue forever (Exodus 34:6-8; Deuteronomy 29:24-29, 32:21-22; Psalm 11:4-7; John 3:36; Romans 1:18-32, 5:5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 1:21-22, 3:6; Revelation 14:9-11, 14:18-20, 19:11-15).

Salvation is made possible through Jesus Christ alone and there is no possibility of salvation apart from Him (John 1:29, 3:17-18, 4:42, 5:19-23; Acts 4:12; Titus 1:15; I John 2:2; Revelation 5:9). This is because Jesus our Priest laid down His life as the substitute sacrifice for the sins of His people (Isaiah 53:6-12; John 11:50, 15:13; Romans 5:17-19; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 10:10, 10:12; I Peter 3:18). Jesus' death and resurrection were a propitiation (appeasing God's wrath, cleansing us from sin, and granting us mercy from God) for His people (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:14; I John 2:2, 4:10).

Scripture also uses the concept of redemption in explaining salvation, which means we were enslaved to sin (John 8:34; Romans 6:6) and consequently Satan (Colossians 2:15) and death. But then we are redeemed, or purchased, by Jesus' death and resurrection to belong to God, righteousness, and life (Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 7:8, 15:15; 2 Samuel 7:23; 1 Chronicles 17:21).

As a result of Jesus, God's people are now reconciled to God and each other (Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20-21). God's people are also given Jesus' triumph over the world, sin, death, and Satan/demons (Psalm 110:1; 1 Corinthians 15:21-28; Ephesians 1:20-23, 2:16; Colossians 1:20-21, 2:13-15).

PROCESS OF SALVATION

Salvation is God's process in a believer's life, as Romans 8:28-30 explains:

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified."

This verse is often thought of as the glorious golden chain of salvation. God initiates, marks out, and secures our salvation, and it cannot be broken. What He begins, He is sure to end (see Philippians 1:6). The underlined words from Romans 8:28-30 are explained further:

- **Foreknowledge** is God's intimate knowledge of events and His people (Acts 2:23; Romans 11:2; I Peter 1:2, 1:20). Predestination literally means "to mark out beforehand" (Acts 4:28; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:5,11)
- **Called** has to do with conversion or a bringing of one to faith (Matthew 22:14; Romans 1:6, 9:24; I Corinthians 1:24, 1:26, 7:18, 7:21; Galatians 1:15; Ephesians 4:1, 4:4).
- **Justified** means to be legally acquitted from wrongdoing (salvation done in past time) (Romans 1:17, 3:21-5:21; Galatians 3:11, Ephesians 2:8-9).
- **Sanctification** (salvation in present time), is the process of maturity as God conforms us to His Son's image (Romans 8:13,29; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:11,19,20; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 1:28; Heb. 13:20-21). Sanctification fuses man's responsibility, God's work, and the church's equipping in the process of a believer's growth in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 2:12-13).
- **Glorification** is the final completion of God's purpose in salvation, which includes our death and resurrection (Romans 8:17, 8:29; I Corinthians 15; Colossians 1:27, 3:4).

This wondrous saving grace of God is given solely because of God's good pleasure, which remains for us a mystery to be adored (Isaiah 53:10; Ephesians 1:3-14; Hebrews 12:2).

WILL EVERYONE BE SAVED?

Simply, no. Hell does exist and sin against an eternal God is an eternal offense requiring an eternal payment to be made by God's enemies (Daniel 12:1-2; Isaiah 66:22-24; Matthew 5:22-30; 10:28; 25:46; John 3:36; Romans 1:18-32; 2 Peter 2:4-22). When the Bible says that God wills that all would be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) and that Jesus Christ died for all (1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2) and that all are invited to salvation (Matthew 28:18-20; John 3:16; Acts 16:31) it cannot mean that all will be saved because the Scriptures are clear regarding the eternal state of punishment for unbelievers.

The Scriptures also teach that Jesus' death is efficient for only particular persons and not everyone in general as indicated by such statements as He died for man and not all (Matthew 20:28, 26:28; Romans 5:17-19). The particulars include:

- His people (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 13:12)
- Friends (John 15:13)
- Sheep (John 10:15)
- Those the Father appointed (John 17:1-11)
- The church (Ephesians 5:23-26; Acts 20:28)
- Us (Titus 2:14)
- Me (Galatians 2:20)

Also, Jesus' death and resurrection actually does redeem (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Hebrews 9:12), reconcile (Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Colossians 1:22); and propitiate (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2). Therefore, if Jesus truly died for everyone, then everyone would be saved. Therefore Jesus' work was particular, or definite for the elect (John 6:38-39, 11:52; Romans 8:32-33).

Some, however, will argue that God should save all people. But God has the right to give grace as He determines (Matthew 20:12-15; Romans 9:20-21), and has done so throughout history (John 15:16; Acts 9:9, 9:15; Romans 3:1-2). Some will accuse God of being unfair, but if God were completely fair and just rather than merciful then *all* would go to hell and none would go to heaven. Also, God has the right to create people for His purposes (Romans 9:22-25).

Therefore, the Scriptures are clear that only some are chosen for salvation (Acts 13:48; Ephesians 1:3-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13), and salvation is solely a work of God (John 1:13, 6:44, 10:26; 1 Corinthians 1:30, 10:30; James 1:18).

IS SALVATION POSSIBLE AFTER DEATH?

No! Hebrews 9:27 clearly states, "*It is appointed for a man to die once, and then comes the judgment.*" According to Jesus, those that reject Him go into eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46). There is simply no second chance for salvation or reincarnation in the Scriptures.

ABERRANT VIEWS OF THE AFTERLIFE

Many eastern religions and new age teachings try to infuse reincarnation interpretations into verses relating to John the Baptist and the coming of Elijah (Matthew 17:10-12; Mark 9:11-13), yet Luke 1:17 reminds us that John came, "in the spirit" of Elijah. He came with the same prophetic office as Elijah, but he is not in any way Elijah. This idea is contrary to Christ's statement about eternal life and judgment, and Hebrews 9:27. The Bible does not teach reincarnation, but reminds us that we have great confidence in knowing that we have access to God (Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 10:19-23). Reincarnation is a degrading and hopeless circle of man working toward god/nirvana, etc. on the basis of his own merit/karma. This is the antithesis of God's grace that saves us by faith (Ephesians 2:8-10) through Christ's sacrifice once and for all (Hebrews 4: 14-16; Hebrews 8+9; 1 Peter 3:18).

The Mormons also utilize verses such as 1 Peter 3:19-20 coupled with 1 Corinthians 15:29 to formulate their doctrine of posthumous salvation through the proxy baptism of the dead. Neither practice is biblical, and both are based on very spurious proof text. The 1 Corinthian text is highly suspect, and used in context to prove a point, not dictate a doctrine. The practice was never used in the early church, and is contrary to the rest of the NT teaching about baptism and those who are dead. The 1 Peter reference is also questionable, but most likely refers to Christ preaching through Noah prior to the flood (1 Peter 3:20-22; 2 Peter 2:5), or possibly Christ making proclamation of facts, but there is no indication contextual or otherwise that this refers to a second chance after death.

WHEN WAS OUR SALVATION DETERMINED?

The salvation of the elect was chosen by God in eternity past before the foundations of the world (Matthew 25:34; Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:5-8; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 17:8).

WHAT IS ELECTION?

Election means to select or choose. The biblical doctrine of election (especially coupled with the doctrine of predestination, see above) means that before God even created, in His foreknowledge He unconditionally selected out those that He determined would be His people and live with Him for eternal life (Rom. 8:28-39; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9-10). Thus election is an expression of God's free and sovereign will, which is done for His good pleasure and to His glory (Ephesians 1:5,6,9,11,12,14).

This is based on His foreknowledge of the fall of man, and their subsequent rejection of Him. The Bible says that there are none that seek after Him (Romans 3:10-12), and man is completely dead in their sins (Ephesians 2:1-7). Man, on his own, is completely incapable of knowing God (1 Corinthians 1:18-25), which is eternal life (John 17:3). God, in His mercy, by grace reached down and spared those that He "foreknew" of His judgment, and allowed the rest to enter into the judgment because of their rebellion and unbelief. This judgment is fair and deserved. As Romans 9:15,16 reminds us, God spares those people unconditionally based on His gracious love, and righteously allows the rest of humankind to continue in their rejection of Him, resulting in judgment (John 3:36). Either way God is glorified in the perfect exercise of the fullness of His attributes (holy, just, righteous, loving, merciful, compassionate, etc.). Subsequently, God opens the ears in understanding of those that are appointed to salvation (Acts 13:48; 16:14).

Two of the clearest teachings on this matter in the Bible are by Paul and Jesus. Paul writes in Romans 9:15-16 *"For God says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."* And in John 15:16 Jesus teaches, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last..."*

God's electing radar encompasses people from all nations, as He is drawing men from all tongues, tribes, and nations unto Himself (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; Ezekiel 36:22-36; John 3:16; Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 1:8; 1 John 2:2; Revelation 5:9,10). This gives us comfort in knowing that God's Spirit is going into the world before us (John 14-16), and drawing men unto Himself (John 6:44), and formulating a people unto Himself (Ezekiel 36:28; 1 Peter 2:4-10). Because of God's work in the world, those who don't have much information about Jesus come to Him through His miraculous work in their lives. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) gives us insight into how God works in this manner. Joel 2 and Acts 2 are literally seen in many Muslims around the world coming to Christ because of dreams, and Hindus coming to Christ because of the miracles God is doing before them. For further study on this matter you are encouraged to read the following Scriptures, which are not exhaustive:

Exodus 9:16
Joshua 11:20
Job 9:1-35

Exodus 33:19
1 Kings 12:15
Psalm 25:12

Exodus 34:24
Job 1:21-22
Psalm 31:15

Deuteronomy 10:15
Job 23:10-16
Psalm 32:5-11

Psalms 33:8-22
Isaiah 10
Matthew 11:25
John 17:6
Acts 17:24-28
Romans 10:12-18
1 Corinthians 26-29
2 Corinthians 13:9
Philippians 2:12-13
Titus 2:11-14
Hebrews 10:35

Psalms 110:1-7
Isaiah 40:20-23
John 6
Acts 4:28
Romans 4:11
Romans 11:7-8
1 Corinthians 4:7
Galatians 1;1
2 Thessalonians 2:7-15
Hebrews 3:4
Hebrews 13:21

Psalms 115:3
Isaiah 61:10-62:2
John 8:31-47
Acts 13:48
Romans 8:19-33
Romans 11:25-12:2
1 Corinthians 6:19-20
Ephesians 1:4-10
2 Thessalonians 3:3
Hebrews 6:17-19
1 Peter 1:4-5

Proverbs 16:4-9
Matthew 10:22-30
John 10:26-29
Acts 16:14
Romans 9:10-26
1 Corinthians 1:2
2 Corinthians 3:4-6
Ephesians 2:10
Titus 1:1-3
Hebrews 10:14

WHAT IS CALLING?

Calling has to do with conversion or a bringing of one to faith. It is often referred to as the effectual calling as opposed to a common calling of all men (Matthew 22:14). Calling may go out to all men, but salvation comes to those God chooses. Some people see this as an insincere offer of salvation, but this is simply not the case. The common call will always produce only salvation for the elect because man, in his unregenerate condition is dead to God (Ephesians 2:1), and incapable of answering His call apart from God regenerating him. Even if an unregenerate person could know the truth, they would naturally suppress and distort it into a lie (Romans 1:18-32).

It is the privilege and duty of Christians to go into the world and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone and anyone, calling them to repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Romans 1:6, 9:24, 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 1:24, 1:26, 7:18, 7:21; Galatians 1:15; Ephesians 4:1, 4:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). And, through our witness and proclamation of the truth of the gospel God works out his drawing of the elect to Himself (Romans 10:14-15). In this way, God's sovereignty over salvation extends to not merely the ends (the saving of the elect) but also the means (God's saving and appointing you as His messenger).

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

Repentance comes as a result of conviction from the Holy Spirit and results in a deep desire to change one's heart and ensuing life by God's grace. This includes repenting of sin and turning to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and salvation (Acts 3:19, 11:21, 14:15, 20:21, 26:18, 26:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; James 5:20).

WHAT IS FAITH?

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen" Hebrews 11:1

Hebrews 11:6 states that *"Without faith, it is impossible to please God."* The word faith is used 232 times in the Bible, and is the primary way that man enters into a relationship with God. God is not found through human reason (1 Corinthians 1:21). Subsequently, faith is the medium by which God is known. This is primarily because man's reason is flawed and incapable of knowing God in this way. So God, rich in mercy, and according to His grace, saved us through faith, a faith that He gave us (Acts 3:16, 14:27; Ephesians 2:8). It is not a matter of the quantity of faith, but the object of faith, which is always God (Ephesians 2:8-10). Proverbs 3:5, therefore, admonishes us to *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding"*

Faith takes us beyond our reason and empirical abilities and allows us to see the spiritual world that God has revealed. He gives us this faith in order for us to experience the world as He sees it and trust Him (Romans 10:9-10). Though this knowledge is not exhaustive (Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9; 1 Corinthians 13:12), it is adequate to know God intimately (John 17:3), and it gives us a fuller understanding of reality as it really is, and as it has been revealed by God.

All ultimate knowledge begins in faith. For any system to be coherent, it must presuppose the authority of that system of thought in order to process information consistently. While this is circular, however, all systems of knowing are ultimately circular because they claim authority. There is ultimately no source more authoritative than itself. Subsequently, it can't be proven through empirical or rational methods itself.

So faith is a wider rationality that sees reality in the way that God has revealed and intended men to know. Faith also is not esoteric. It is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is God's "exact representation" here on earth (Hebrews 1:3).

WHAT IS GRACE?

Grace, or "Charis" in the Greek, means a gift from God (Acts 15:11; Romans 4:5, 11:5-6; Galatians 2-3, Galatians 5:1, 5:13; Ephesians 2:1-10; Philippians 1:6) and reminds us that we were saved by God's gift to us, and that our salvation had nothing to do with human works, religious or otherwise (John 1:13; Romans 9:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-6). God's grace is His continuing gift to His people. It is a completely undeserved act of mercy that He bestows on His people.

We are not only saved by grace, but we are established and empowered by God's grace in our lives (Acts 4:33; 6:8; 13:43; Romans 3:24; 5:15; 12:16; 15:15; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 12:9). In addition, we are given life and cleansing from sin by God's grace (Romans 6:1, 6:14-17; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Ephesians 1:7, 2:5-8). God's grace also comes to His people by means of spiritual gifts that are unique abilities that enable Christians to serve God fruitfully (Romans 12:6; 1 Peter 4:10). Therefore, Christians know that whatever good comes from their works is ultimately the fruit of God's grace working in and through them (1 Corinthians 15:10).

CAN JESUS LOSE A CHRISTIAN?

Some people wonder if a Christian can lose their salvation. The Bible, however, states that salvation does not belong to Christians but instead belongs to God (Jonah 2:9). Therefore, the question is not whether or not a Christian can lose their salvation, but rather whether Jesus can lose a Christian.

According to Scripture, Jesus does not lose any people that God has given Him (John 6:39; 10:28; 17:12). The doctrine of the "Perseverance of the Saints" (sometimes known as "once saved always saved") is very misunderstood, and intricately tied into the doctrine of election. If we are choosing God, then it is certain that we can choose out too. The traditional Arminian position on the matter is that a believer can "lose his/her salvation." This is consistent with that understanding of salvation. However, if God chooses us before the foundation of the world (see question above about when salvation was determined), then how can we lose it? Jesus does not lose those His Father gave Him, period! So what do we do with verses like Hebrews 6:4-6, or 10:29, which seem to indicate that you can lose your salvation? They must be interpreted in light of the nature of salvation, and the nature of God's role in salvation. It is quite possible that these Hebrew verses reflect individuals that were with us, "but were not really of us" (See 1 John 2:19). Paul is clear that nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:35-39) and that even if or when we are unfaithful to God we are secure because He remains faithful to us (2 Timothy 2:13).

Note: It is imperative to realize that this assurance does not depend on you making a choice towards God in some sort of ritual (i.e. prayer, baptism, communion, etc.), but is secured by the work that God, through His Son Jesus, did on the cross. Assurance comes from knowing that God is at work in you (Philippians 1:6; 1 John). Too often we have assured people they are saved because they grew up in the church, or once said a prayer, but this is simply unbiblical. Assurance comes from trusting in Christ, and realizing that God is growing His love in our lives. It is His Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are His.

CAN A CHRISTIAN BECOME PERFECT?

A lot of the confusion in this area comes from confusion in the areas of the nature of sin and sanctification. Even Christians tend to take a human view of sin, which normally sees sin as systemic or external, and we fail to realize the scope and consequences of sin on the human condition. Man is depraved mentally, spiritually,

emotionally and physically. Sin has touched all areas of the human condition including our reason and will (Total depravity; see Lesson # 3: Creation and Sin). Philippians 3:12-14 tells us that we (through God's sanctifying grace) continue to strive towards the goal of perfection, but we will run short of the goal on earth because of the sin that is still present in our bodies (Romans 7:14-25). This is precisely why we need new (glorified) bodies to enter into the eternal presence of God (1 Corinthians 15). Therefore, anyone who in this life claims to be without sin is deceived and lying (I John 1:8).

As an example, the apostle Paul, through the course of his writings, seemed to view himself not as more nearly perfect, but instead more continually aware of his sin, as he grew to more fully know and love the one true and holy God. Early in his ministry, Paul tells us that he is the least of the apostles (I Corinthians 15:9). Later, he tells us that he is the least of all the saints (Ephesians 3:8). And yet later he tells us that he is the chief of sinners (I Timothy 1:15). Paul is abundantly clear that he did not even achieve anything nearing perfection near the completion of his ministry (Philippians 3:12-14). For anyone to suggest that they have become perfect would be an arrogance no less than claiming to be more holy than the man through whom God wrote at least twelve books of the Bible (Hebrews may have also been penned by Paul).

HUMAN UNDERSTANDING OF SALVATION

FROM AN EMPHASIS ON → → → → TO AN EMPHASIS ON WHAT
 MAN'S WORK IN SALVATION GOD DOES IN SALVATION

	Non- Christian Theology of Universalism	Christian Heresy of Pelagianism	Christian Arminianism	Christian Lutheranism	Christian Soft Calvinism	Christian Hard Calvinism
Adam's Sin	Not given to us, we are born perfect like Adam	Not given to us, we are born perfect like Adam	Given to us, we are born with a sin nature, but to not have his guilt	Given to us, we're born sinful	Given to us, we're born sinful	Given to us, we're born sinful
How Saving Grace Is Given	To all people	To those who choose It	Through common grace to those who choose It	Through faith, baptism & communion	From God alone	From God alone
Who Jesus Died For	All people and all religions	All people	All people	All people	Sufficient for all people, but only applied to the elect	Limited for the elect only
How Someone Is Elected to Salvation	Everyone is elect and saved	People elect themselves	God elects those He foreknows will choose Him	God chooses who is saved and goes to heaven	God chooses who is saved by electing before time began	God chooses who is saved by electing before time began
Salvation and Heaven	Everyone is saved and goes to heaven	Everyone can be saved and go to heaven if they choose	Everyone can be saved and go to heaven if they don't resist God	God chooses who is saved and goes to heaven	God chooses who is saved and goes to heaven	God chooses who is saved and goes to heaven
Damnation and Hell	No one is damned and goes to hell	For those who choose it	For those who reject Jesus	An uncertain mystery who goes to hell and how it is decided	God determines who will be damned	God alone determines who must be damned and sends them to hell
People Who Have Not Heard the Gospel	Go to heaven	Likely go to hell	Likely go to hell	Unknown, God may save some	God likely saves some	God likely saves some

These first two views are heretical and counter sound Christian theology; they may not be held by Element Christian Church members	These two views are debated views within Christian theology and may be held by those desirous of church membership.	These two views are where Elements elders stand on salvation; while you may hold the previous two views, you must know where your pastors stand on the issue and agree not to be divisive.
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FOR FURTHER READING

The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination by Lorraine Boettner

The Five Points of Calvinism by Edwin Palmer

Easy Chairs, Hard Words by Douglas Wilson

Putting Amazing Back Into Grace by Michael Horton

Back To Basics by David Hagopian

Chosen By God by R.C. Sproul

Faith Alone by R.C. Sproul

Grace Unknown by R.C. Sproul

Willing To Believe by R.C. Sproul