

The Sure Word Bible Studies

Lesson 13

Models of Salvation

Our personal salvation and how we secure that is a critically important subject. And as many other topics we have studied, there are also various views about this one as well. So before making a choice about our salvation we should in mind it that it is very dangerous to put our salvation into the hands of another, whether that be a close friend, a preacher, or even mom and dad. Of course none of these people would purposefully mislead us, but they could be wrong and not aware of it. Personal salvation is just that, it is personal, and it is something that we must know and experience for ourselves. In this lesson we will look at the question: What does a person have to do to ensure that they will have eternal life? Someone long ago wrote the following:

“The plan of redemption is so far-reaching that philosophy cannot explain it. It will ever remain a mystery that the most profound reasoning cannot fathom. The science of salvation cannot be explained; but it can be known by experience.”

This is basically saying that the science, meaning the knowledge, of salvation is something that can't be put into words but must be experienced. That is true of many things in life. For example, when we eat a banana, we learn what it is like to experience the taste. But we don't know how to put that taste onto words so that we could tell someone else exactly what a banana tastes like. The only way they could know would be to bite into the banana and experience the taste for themselves. Since the science of salvation is something that can't be put into words but must be experienced, then we need things like metaphors, allegories, stories and models to give us some idea of what the experience is like.

In Christianity the method to be followed to secure salvation is known by the term "the plan of salvation." Today most people understand the plan of salvation in a legal, law-court setting. In this scenario God is seen as the Law Giver and Judge, Satan as the accuser, the sinner as the guilty criminal and Jesus as the advocate or defense attorney. We will refer to this plan as the "legal model." And though there are many variations, the following is a list of the basic points of the legal model of the plan of salvation.

1. God being the Sovereign Creator of all things has given laws and commandments as He sees fit which are to be obeyed by all His creatures.
2. Violators of God's law (sinners) must be punished.
3. The ultimate penalty for violation (sin) is being cast into the lake of fire / hell.
4. God is the Judge and Executioner of the penalty against sin.

5. To escape the penalty, the guilty sinner must be pardoned.
6. All mankind is guilty of sin and therefore all are condemned to hell.
7. The innocent Son of God came and paid the penalty on behalf of the sinner.
8. If a person accepts Christ death on his behalf he is pardoned and will not be punished but granted eternal life.

Most people are taught that God is powerful and holy and not to be trifled with. At the same time, He is said to be loving and just. And being a just God, He will punish you if you break His law because that is what justice requires. However, the sinner can escape the lake of fire if he repents of his sin and is forgiven. That being the case, the major concern of the legal model of salvation is forgiveness, or to use the legal term, pardon.

If a person is at the place in their understanding that they see God in this way, they need to know God will pardon them for breaking His law, so the Bible tells us, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins"* (1 John 1:9).

However, there are a number of problems with this legal model. One major problem is that the legal model brings into question God's willingness to freely forgive. For example, in this model it is taught that Jesus had to die in the sinners place before God would forgive sin. To put it bluntly, this model teaches that God requires the blood of an sinless, innocent victim before He will forgive the sinner and, Jesus, God's own Son was that victim. This idea is preached from the pulpit, taught in Bible classes and written in the words of church hymns. The following statements taken from a set of Bible study guides published by a mainline church denomination highlight this popular view.

"Jesus had to die so God could forgive us of our sin."

"Sin can be forgiven only by death."

"When Jesus died, all our sins were forgiven."

The problem with these statements is that this is **not** what the Bible teaches! For one clear example note the following text:

Psalm 40:6 *"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require."*

God does not require that the sinner appease Him with a blood sacrifice before He will forgive. That was not the purpose for the sacrifices in the Old Testament system and it is not the reason Jesus died. If God had required the death of Jesus as payment before He could forgive our sin that means God is not forgiving. For example, say you owed an creditor a million dollars and was unable to repay the debt. One day a good friend, seeing your dilemma, went to the creditor whom you owed the million dollars and said "I will pay you the million dollars my friend owes." So your creditor

accepts the money from your friend and then says to you "your debt is forgiven." But the fact is, your creditor did not forgive your debt at all, he just accepted payment from someone else!

In the same way, if God would only forgive us if Jesus paid our debt, then God has not forgiven us at all, He has only accepted payment from Jesus. That of course does make Jesus look good, but how does it make God the Father look? If a person carefully thinks this through, it can be seen that in this legal model Satan has artfully crafted a theory of salvation that makes God look no better than the pagan gods of old who required a blood sacrifice before they would forgive and bless!

The expression, "Jesus died to pay for all our sins," which, by the way, is not in the Bible, is not a well thought out statement. If that statement is true, then all people will be saved whether they accept Christ's death or not. If the penalty for sin being paid is all that is required to grant man entrance into heaven, then the requirement has been met and since Jesus died for everyone, then everyone is paid up. If He paid for all our sins, they are paid for and the debt no longer owed whether we acknowledge it or not! Again, if this is carefully thought through it just does not make good sense!

Another major issue with the legal model is that it leads to presumption. Since being taught that forgiveness is all the sinner needs to be saved, and since Jesus has secured that for us, that's all that matters. Thus people have no lasting motivation to change or to live a righteous life. There is little, if any, focus on a change of character which is so badly needed as we have seen in previous studies. As a result, the "saved" person "presumes" on God's grace by committing sin thinking that since they are forgiven their salvation is secure and sin really doesn't matter that much anymore. This is the premise of the "once saved always saved" doctrine.

So think about these questions - Will forgiveness change our sinful nature? Will being forgiven make a violent person safe to live with? Does it make sense that forgiveness is all the sinner needs to be saved? The obvious answer to these questions is no. The Bible is clear, only with a new heart and right spirit will we be safe to live with now, or in the hereafter.

Remember when Nicodemus came to Jesus one night asking Him about salvation - did Jesus say to have eternal life "*You must be forgiven?*" or to have eternal life "*You must be born again?*" Jesus said you must be born again! (John 3:1-3). God's grace changes a person so drastically that it is like being born all over again and becoming "*a new creature in Christ*" (II Corinthians 5:17).

The traditional way of understanding how a person is saved, the legal model, is not supported by scripture and we need to re-examine that age-old question, "*What must I do to be saved?*" We need to put aside the old "legal model" and begin looking to the Bible for a better model, which, as with any other teaching, must be found true to the scriptures to be acceptable.

The following are a few verses that point us to a true biblical model of salvation.

Isaiah 1:5,6 *"Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it, But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment."*

Isaiah 53:5 *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."*

Jeremiah 17:14 *"Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for you are my praise."*

Matthew 13:15 *"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."*

Mark 2:17 *"When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

It should be noted that these texts are not only referring to the healing of the diseases of the body, but are rather illustrating or using physical healing as a model or a way of understanding the spiritual healing of the heart and mind.

The New Testament term most often used for salvation is the word "saved." The Greek word is "sozo" and it means, "to be safe," or "to be well" or "to be healed." This word can be understood as "being healed," or "being saved" and is translated both ways as we can see in the book of Mark:

Mark 5:22,23 *"And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live."*

In this verse the word "healed" is the Greek word "sozo."

Mark 10:25 - 26 *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"*

In this verse the word "saved" is also translated from the Greek word "sozo."

In the preceding passages we can see that the Bible illustrates salvation in a “healing model.” In this model, instead of seeing all human beings born as guilty criminals condemned to die, all humans are seen as being born infected with a critical illness that will result in their death if they are not healed. This is a spiritual infection, they are “sin-sick.” And the major focus in this model is not forgiveness, but finding the remedy whereby the sick may be cured and live.

By looking at salvation in the setting of the healing model we will find answers to our questions that actually make sense. One of those questions is how did mankind get in this deadly condition in the first place? As we learned previously, the sin problem began in the mind of Lucifer and then later spread to this earth.

Isaiah 14:12 *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;'"*

A person’s thinking is not done in the organ in the chest called the heart, but in the mind. When Adam and Eve made up their mind and acted on the suggestion of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, their brains were literally changed and this “brain damage” was passed on to their children. Modern research into the working of the brain is proving this to be true. Note the following statement from the book, *The New Brain - How the Modern Age is Rewiring Your Mind*, by Richard Resak, M.D. Published by Rodale 2003

“We now recognize that our brain isn’t limited by considerations that are applicable to machines. Thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than mechanical laws, determine the health of our brain. Furthermore, we now know that the brain never loses the power to transform itself on the basis of experience, and this transformation can occur over very short intervals.”

The brain can transform itself on the basis of experience, and this change can occur over very short intervals. When God created Adam and Eve they were created with their minds “wired” for righteousness. But when the serpent introduced the new thought to their minds that God could not be trusted, and they made the decision that Satan was right and ate of the tree which God said not to eat of, their brains were changed. Their brains were actually "rewired," new neural networks were established and they began to think differently. As result, they had alienated themselves from God and if God had not intervened on their behalf, they would not have survived the damage they had done to themselves.

Researchers have also discovered that certain behavior affects the genes and can be passed on to the offspring. A proven example of this is alcoholism which can be passed from the parent to the child through the DNA. In the same way, the psychological disorder or "brain damage" incurred by Adam and Eve has passed through the D.N.A. of every generation since that fateful day in the garden.

Romans 5:12 *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned"*

A noted Bible commentator described the root of the problem in the book entitled God's Amazing Grace:

"Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil. He was made captive by Satan, and would have remained so forever had not God specially interposed."

"Selfishness took the place of love" and where did that happen? In the mind! This becomes clear from the fact that children are born with a self centered nature inherited from their parents. The most challenging job for parents is teaching children to overcome this natural tendency. But if we think about it, every sin can be traced back to self. Its all about me - my needs - my wants - my rights! Things like greed, hatred, jealousy, lying, stealing, adultery, violence, murder are only *symptoms* of the greater psychological disorder of self-centeredness that, if not checked, like cancer or leprosy spreads and grows until it consumes its victim and in the end destroys him!

Most of us have seen enough in life to know this, so why do we cling to it? - Why do we try to justify it? Have we convinced ourselves we are fine just as we are - that we have no need to change? Do we think we can go on through life doing the same selfish, sinful things and yet somehow it will come out different for us? That's insane! In fact, that's what sin is - it's insanity!

Thinking of this as insanity in the setting of the healing model, it can be likened to a father who has a child who is suffering from a mental disorder. Because of his mental condition the child many times behaves badly. His father hates it when his child behaves in disorderly ways, but he loves and pities the child realizing the child doesn't know what he's doing. Therefore he doesn't punish the child, but does everything he can to help him. This should help us to understand what Jesus had in mind when He said, *"Father forgive them - they know not what they do."*

This should help us to understand how God loves the sinner while hating the sin. More than that, to help us better see how we should relate to others whom we see as sinners. Instead of condemning and criticizing, we should love them and pity them realizing that the worse they are behaving, the more they need our sympathy and our help! The fact is that all of us are all sin-sick, some may be sicker than others, but there are no exceptions.

In the healing model we see God, not as a Judge deciding our guilt or innocence and issuing the sentence or granting pardon as He sees fit. Rather we see God as a

physician diagnosing a patient and revealing his condition. In the end God will make this declaration:

Revelation 22:11 *"He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still."*

This is not the verdict of who is saved and who is lost. This is the Great Physician's diagnosis of those who are safe to save in the kingdom and those who are not.

In the healing model the question changes from, "What must we do to be forgiven?" to "What must we do to be healed, to be made well?" Jesus gives us three basic steps in the following passage.

Luke 6:47- 48 *"Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock."*

Note the steps –

- 1) Come – Come to Jesus.
- 2) Hear – Carefully listen to what He says we should do.
- 3) Do – Co-operate, do the best you can to do the things Christ says to do, and you are *"building your house on THE Rock,"* and you shall be saved.

We can fill in more detail to those basic steps to the healing process:

First - We must *"confess,"* that is admit that we have a problem. Like an alcoholic in denial, some people insist that they do not have problem.

I John 1:9 says *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

So just like the alcoholic, the sinner must "confess" they have a problem. Even then, if they try to correct their behavior by sheer will power they will fail, time after time. However, once a person admits they are sick (a sinner) and realize that they can't heal themselves, then they are ready for the next step. Remember Jesus said - *"They that are whole do not need a physician, but those who are sick"*

Next we need to find a physician who can help us. This needs to be done with great care. We don't want to go to a quack, or a doctor who has not proven to be reliable. We want to find one whom we can trust with our eternal life! The Bible says – *"Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."* (sozo - healed)

As the Lawgiver, Jesus forgives us. As the Creator, only He can *“Create in us a clean heart and a right spirit,”* only He can re-wire our damaged brains. He is the Great Physician - the only One who can heal us.

Then we must *go* to our physician. Jesus said, *“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”* (John 6:37), but, He will not force us to be well. If we won't come to Him – He can't help us. And we must faithfully keep our appointments. This includes - daily devotions - Bible study - prayer - witness - keeping the Sabbath. If we are too busy, if other things (even good things) take up our time and there is no time left for treatment, our recovery will be greatly hindered!

Finally, we must do what our physician prescribes. Everyone wants to be well, but some don't want to do what the doctor says. The doctor may say they need a little surgery, or they may need to get some exercise or take some medicine, and in order for us to get well, we must co-operate with our physician. If we refuse to do what the doctor prescribes can we expect to get well? Of course not.

This is where faith comes in. Doctors cannot save their patients who do not trust or have enough faith in them to keep their appointments and do the things they prescribe. Doctors may love their sick patients; they may forgive them for not taking their medicine – but the patient will not get well, because love and forgiveness will not heal the damage done by the disease. We read that God has *“Loved you with an everlasting love”* and that *“His mercy endures forever,”* but if we harden our heart and will not listen, if we will not follow God's instructions, though He will still forgive us and love us – He can't heal us – He can't save us!

All of us are in one of two situations.

1) We are in the recovery / healing process and our sinful condition is in remission. The Christian is to be continually *“growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.”* And as long as we are in the healing process, even if our lives are cut short, we are where God wants us to be and therefore we are safe to save. Our healing will be completed when Jesus comes.

2) Refusing to place our trust in the Great Physician, we are not in the healing process and therefore are getting sicker and closer not only to physical, but to spiritual death as well. The continual, willful refusal to trust and co-operate with the Great Physician, we will eventually become so hardened in sin that we will be incurable and God will have to let us go.

The following is a comparison chart of the two models of salvation

The Legal Model

The Healing Model

God as the Creator of the universe has arbitrarily set forth His law by which the universe is to be governed.	God is love and created the universe to operate on the principle of love. God's law is the law of love.
God will punish the willful violators of His law.	Violators of God's laws will suffer the natural consequence.
The ultimate punishment for violation (sin) is death (hell).	The ultimate consequence of violation (sin) is death by sin, not at God's hand.
God is the judge and the executioner.	God is the Great Physician and life giver. Those who reject Him He gives up to go their own way.
To avoid the penalty for sin, one must be forgiven.	To avoid suffering and death one must be healed; forgiveness only being a part of that process.
All humans are violators of God's law – all are guilty and condemned to death.	All humans are infected with sin - sickness, thus all are subject to death.
The innocent Son of God came and paid the penalty for the guilty so God could forgive them.	God sent His Son that by His life and death we may be won back to trust God and thereby healed of our deadly infection.
If a person accepts Christ as Savior he is pardoned and will not be punished but granted eternal life.	If a person comes to the Great Physician and in faith does his best to follow Him he will be healed and will never die.

In the healing model just as medical doctors do not kill their diseased and dying patients but do everything possible to heal and save them, in the same way God as the Great Physician, does not kill His sick and dying children but does everything possible to heal and save them! Remember the following text from the last lesson on the final death of the wicked.

James 1:14,15 *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; **and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.**"*

Just as a terminal cancer, sin is the ultimate source of death, but God is the ultimate source of life. And rather than condemning us, God is trying desperately to save us – not so He won't have to punish us – but so that sin will not destroy us! Sin destroys! God heals! God gives life! Sin takes it!

In this deadly conflict between good and evil we must realize who our enemy is so that we are not fighting the wrong battle. We blame sin and evil on Satan and rightly so, but if the Devil died today it wouldn't change all that much. The seeds of evil he planted in the minds of Adam and Eve took root long ago and have been passed down from generation to generation to everyone of us. Our worst enemy is within us! Our worst enemy is our selfish, sinful nature and it will destroy us if we aren't delivered from it!

Today, if you realize you are sin-sick and that you are not doing well, consider the Great Physician. He accepts walk-ins; you need no appointment, and He still makes house calls! He can heal any illness, no matter how hopeless it may seem to you, but you have got to call on Him. You have got to trust Him - *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."*

In our next lesson we will look at what the Bible says about caring for the control center of our being, the mind.

Response Questions:

1. It is clear to me that I need more than God's forgiveness to be saved. Yes ___ No ___
2. It is clear to me that sin is like a deadly disease and only God has the remedy to heal it. Yes ___ No ___
3. It is clear to me that the healing model of salvation is biblical. Yes ___ No ___
4. I am willing to come, listen, and do the things the Lord says that I may be saved, or healed and have eternal life. Yes ___ No ___