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1

HOW “BEING SAVED” MAKES ME DIFFERENT

Welcome to the family! You are a new believer, and you have joined the family of God! We’re glad you’re here. Now maybe you’re wondering what exactly has happened to you. Well, I’m glad you asked!

You have been “saved”! That means you were headed toward death, but now you’re safe and sound.

We can probably all remember someone coming up to us sometime in our life with a wild look in his eyes and exclaiming, “Are you saved?”

We may have laughed it off, thinking it was such a sensationalistic term to use. After all, before coming to Jesus you weren’t in a burning house or lost at sea. You were just living life one day at a time. Sure, it wasn’t as good as you wanted it to be, but you weren’t in a desperate situation.

Or at least you didn’t think you were.

But in reality, the term “saved” is a very apt description of what happens to people who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Your real situation was actually worse than being in a burning house or a stormy sea. Before

coming to Christ, you were separated from God and on your way to a certain judgment in a very real place called hell! But God reached out to you and, quite literally, *saved* you. The Bible uses that word to describe what happened:

- Jesus came to “*save* his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).
- “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the *salvation* of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16, NIV).
- “There is *salvation* in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to *save* them” (Acts 4:12).
- “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be *saved*” (Acts 2:21, NIV).

Saved . . . From What?

Have you ever heard someone's dramatic story of coming to know Christ and, in telling it, his old life almost sounds more appealing than the new one? He will describe in vivid detail all the adventures and exploits of sin and then, as sort of a P.S. say (yawn), “But now that I'm saved I read the Bible, go to church, and pray.”

If this is the case, you are dealing with a person who does not really realize the significance of salvation, someone who does not understand what he or she has been saved *from*.

Do you really know how significant salvation is?

Do you realize what God has done for you?

Do you know how powerful and sufficient Jesus Christ and his salvation really are?

Okay, so what does it actually mean to be *saved*?

To be “saved” means you were in a serious, life-threatening situation. You were facing judgment and eternity in hell. But salvation, bought for you by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross in your place, has saved you from judgment and from hell. Romans 5:9-10 says,

Since we have been *made right in God’s sight* by the blood of Christ, he will certainly *save us from God’s judgment*. For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life. [emphasis mine]

Saved . . . For What?

Not only has Christ saved you from a future judgment, he is offering you abundant life. You don’t need to live day by day as you were before you were saved, for now every day is filled with adventure for God.

Everything you need in life is found in a relationship with God! Paul wrote to the Colossians, “For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body, and you are complete through your union with Christ”

(Colossians 2:9-10). The word “complete” could be translated “to satisfy, to cram, finish, to fill up.” In other words, through salvation, God is giving you more than you could ever fully utilize.

Often new believers (and sometimes older ones too) initially doubt that salvation has really come to them. The devil whispers, “Do you really think God would save someone like you? You psyched yourself into this. It’s not real. You can trusssssst me!”

This is nothing new.

Satan has been using this routine since the Garden of Eden, when he essentially said to Eve, “God did not say what you think he said.”

Once you have trusted Jesus, you must realize that your salvation is not based on how you feel, but rather on what God has said.

Here are a few verses assuring you of your salvation.

- “All who believe in the Son of God know that this is true” (1 John 5:10).
- “For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:16).
- “I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life” (John 5:24).

- “I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

Notice that the last verse does not say “that you may *feel* that you have eternal life” or “that you may *hope* (if God is in a really good mood) that you have eternal life.” It says, “That you may *know* you have eternal life.”

You have been given the certainty of a new life, but that may mean some changes from how you used to live. But God also gives you a new power to live a new life. Romans 8:11-12 says, “The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you. So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do.”

God wants to give you a complete and abundant life, but like light and darkness, God and sin will not coexist. You cannot continue in your old sinful ways and be pleasing to God. Your sin nature still exists, and you will sin at times, but your desires and attitudes need to change. This may mean making some drastic changes in order to let God’s light shine into your life.

For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful

pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God. . . . He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing what is right. (Titus 2:11-12, 14)

A truly saved person is “totally committed to doing what is right.” Notice, you do not need to be a perfect person always doing what is right, but one who is committed to trying, by the grace of God, to change. When Christ lives in you, you are a different person! Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As a new believer, there simply must be changes in your life. Some people think that because they have “prayed to receive Christ,” they can pretty much live as they please. They think they have taken care of heaven, so they can “live like hell.” Some try to straddle these two worlds, but that just doesn’t work. It’s a lot like getting in the ocean when it’s really cold. It’s easier just to dive in or not get wet at all.

How do you know if you have truly become a Christian? What’s going on in your heart? What do other people see in your attitudes and actions? God sees your heart, but people around you see how you’re acting and if you’re changing. James wrote,

“Now someone may argue, ‘Some people have faith; others have good deeds.’ I say, ‘I can’t see your faith if you don’t have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds.’ Do you still think it’s enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?” (James 2:18-20). Your faith must result in a changed life. Simply believing is not enough; actions will prove your faith.

Unfortunately, some want to claim to be believers but refuse to obey God’s Word. Jesus made this searching statement about the Pretenders out there. “Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as ‘Lord,’ but they still won’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

But what does this mean? It means if you are really saved, there will be clear results in your life. Works don’t save anyone, but they are a good indication that you are saved. Some of these “works” will be discussed in the following chapters.

A Spiritual Check-Up

Let’s do a little “Spiritual Check-up” on our lives. Following are six indicators that you are living life as a new believer. (All of these come from the book of 1 John.)

1. You confessed Jesus Christ as Lord.

“All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God” (1 John 4:15).

Obviously, this is important. You don't go anywhere without this first step. You accepted Jesus Christ. Now you need to tell someone else. You need to openly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is now your Lord and Savior.

2. You are seeking to obey Christ's commands.

“This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:3-4, NIV).

This is a problem for some people. They obey the commands they want to obey, the ones that don't conflict with the way they want to live. But Jesus said, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14, NKJV). You are to do *whatever* God commands—not whatever you personally agree with or whatever you find easy, but whatever he says.

Note also that verse 3 in 1 John says that “his commands are not burdensome.” You will not find the Christian life to be miserable and confining. You will not discover that God is out to spoil all your fun. Instead, when you truly know Jesus, you will have a new outlook on life. You will have new God-given desires

to please him, and you will want to avoid that which would displease him. Why? Because you love him. And because you love him, you will be seeking to obey his commands. You will not find them “burdensome.” In fact, obedience will bring you the best joy possible!

3. You love and obey God’s Word.

“But those who obey God’s word really do love him. That is the way to know whether or not we live in him” (1 John 2:5).

In order to “obey God’s word” you will have to read and study it. You will need to develop the habit of both Bible study and memorization, committing yourself to learning the Word of God. Sadly, many who have made commitments to Christ have never developed a good habit of Bible study. If you do not do that, you will be easy prey for the devil. The psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). I still have permanently etched in my mind verses I committed to memory as a teenager (which was a long time ago!).

Paul gave these words to a young man named Timothy. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NIV). You will find a later chapter in this book that will help you learn how to get into God’s Word. It is important that you learn to love

the Bible, that it becomes a familiar book. God will speak to you through his Word. You will need to be listening.

4. You are miserable when you sin.

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9, NIV).

The Greek translation of this verse would read, “Everyone who has been born of God does not habitually sin because his seed remains in him. And he is not able habitually to sin, because out of God he has been born.”

Of course, this does not mean that you, as a Christian, will be sinless. But you should be sinning less and less. The Bible says that you need to repent of your sin. The word *repent* speaks of changing the direction in your life. This means when you really come to know Jesus Christ, you turn from all known sin. Only you can repent of your sin, and only God can forgive it.

Many have not taken this first, elementary step toward Christ. They say they have “received Christ,” but they have not repented. In order to truly receive, you must also repent, because you must let go of one thing in order to take hold of another. If you commit a sin, and you feel miserable inside, then you can be sure that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in your life and is doing some housecleaning!

5. You keep yourself out of Satan’s way.

“We know that those who have become part of God’s family do not make a practice of sinning, for God’s Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot get his hands on them” (1 John 5:18).

You are part of God’s family and you are held securely, but you do need to protect yourself. Some people, places, and activities make it easier for the devil to tempt you. Now that you’ve been delivered from the kingdom of Satan, you have no desire to deliberately get back into his clutches. So you may need to change some ingrained patterns. Some friendships will change or end. Some recreational activities need to be replaced with something more wholesome. Remember, you’re not giving up anything except what tears you down and seeks to destroy you. And you can replace all of those things with new friendships, new activities, and new desires and goals that will be better than you ever imagined!

6. You love other Christians.

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too” (1 John 5:1).

You might say, “Well, I haven’t found a church I like yet, and besides, I work all week and Sunday is my only day off.”

That’s nothing more than a shallow excuse. You will find the time for what is important to you. And if

you have truly been saved, gathering together with God's people for fellowship will be a priority in your life.

God says, "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other" (Hebrews 10:25). He did *not* say, "Don't neglect meeting with other Christians unless Sunday is your only day off, in which case you are excused, because you just don't need fellowship as much as other Christians do."

So find a good church and attend regularly. Develop some Christian friendships. Seek out new relationships that will build you up in your faith.

As a new believer, you will find the above six earmarks showing up in your life. And people will notice. When they do, tell them what happened to you!

Will you slip up? Yes. Will you sin? Yes. Will you occasionally find yourself in an awkward situation because of this new faith that you're trying to work out in your life? Definitely. You have abandoned Satan's camp and joined his enemy—and he is now on the offensive to do what he can to bring you down.

I recently had the privilege of leading someone to the Lord. The thing that was holding him back from initially making that commitment was a fear of failing. I reassured him that God will give us the power to be the person he wants us to be. Being a Christian is not you trying to do it for God. Rather, it is Christ living in

and through you. The Bible says, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12, NIV). That does not mean that you have to somehow make your salvation happen. The verse could be translated, “With fear and trembling, carry to the goal and complete your own salvation.” You will be moving step by step. Your eternity with Christ begins today. But you won’t be walking alone, for the next verse continues: “For it is *God who works in you* to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13, NIV, emphasis mine).

Let’s Get Moving!

As a new believer, you are a brand-new person. You may not look any different. You may only feel a little bit different. And you may not be sure where to go next. But rest assured, you have embarked on a lifetime with Christ that will cause you to have a life of such joy and fulfillment that you can hardly believe it.

What does your faith look like in your daily living? Read on, for this book will help you take those first few steps in your Christian life. Christ walks with you.