

Christian Basics

CHAPTER FOUR

SALVATION

WHY THIS CHAPTER IS IMPORTANT

- We must understand that creation was made perfect
- We must understand that creation is now fallen
- We must understand that there is only ONE plan of salvation

Human history is riddled with unspeakable atrocities. Whether nation against nation or person against person, one thing remains the same: evil has entrenched itself deeply within our world. There is no sign of evil disappearing any time soon.

We can sit before our TV sets and be amazed by the steady stream of indecent acts committed on foreign soil and on our own. The bad news knows no boundaries. Maybe we have gotten so used to all the newscasters who report in that trained, sing-song cadence of theirs that we have lost the ability to be amazed at all. We hear about evil every day and maybe have grown a little numb. Yet, the question of the existence of evil continues to haunt all of us.

Imagine if by some stroke of magic the news was reported with a little different slant:

An armed robbery took place today at First National Bank. The robber got away with an undisclosed amount of cash after shooting two bank guards and one teller. They are in serious condition, but are expected to recover from their wounds. An all-points bulletin has gone out to find the person who committed this sin. ... In other news, four youths were apprehended as they committed the sin of vandalism at the local elementary school. ... In international news, the nation of Sardon has sinned by invading the territory of Krabitz. I'm sorry to report that many deaths of innocent civilians have resulted because of this sin. ... Now a message from our sponsor.

A news cast such as this will never take place because our secular world will not allow that three-letter word “sin” into the national vocabulary. I am not here to argue for its inclusion, but to ponder what the omission of that word from our collective vocabulary might mean. Could it mean that, as we are mystified by the ever-present evil all around us, we have failed to discern the true cause of this evil? As we come to terms with the biblical meaning behind that little word “sin”, the mystery of evil will become much less a mystery and much more a sobering reality. As the light begins to shine on the reality of sin the light will also shine on the solution. We will discover the underlying problem that is behind the calamities that have afflicted humanity ever since recorded history and we will also learn about the answer.

This is the chapter on salvation. In this chapter we will look at the nature of the problem that confronts all of humanity and we will also look at the remedy. The remedy is contained in what has been called the gospel. Gospel comes from the Old English word, “godspel,” or good-story. The Old English word came from the Greek word “eu” (good) “angel” (message). From this word we get evangel and evangelism. So, the gospel (good news) is spread via an evangelist: one who proclaims good news. This good news is the best news of all. Your understanding and appreciation of the gospel should deepen as you work through this chapter.

AVERSION ALERT

Many people have an aversion to words like “salvation” and “sin.” Words like these bring up negative images in their minds. Some may have mental images of fire and brimstone preachers leaning over pulpits pointing bony fingers at cowering congregations. These words may seem archaic and outdated to our modern ears.

Do not to allow yourself to be diverted from the truth by preconceived notions regarding words like these. A proper biblical understanding will reveal that words like these still have an overwhelming effect on our civilization today. Therefore, they remain highly relevant in today’s world.

Section One

HOW WE GOT HERE

Before we can comprehend the horrendous problem of sin in the world we must first get a clear understanding of how we got into this fix in the first place. We must go to the beginning. We must go the book of beginnings: the book of Genesis. The first three chapters of Genesis give the complete picture of the human dilemma. Until these first three chapters are understood there can be no satisfactory and complete answer.

OVERVIEW OF GENESIS 1-3

Genesis chapter one: THE CREATION

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The emphasis in the first chapter of Genesis is on creation in a general sense. God placed his blessing on creation by pronouncing a divine benediction over each phase, “and God saw that it was good.” After the sixth day we are given this summary: “God saw all that he had made and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Let no one doubt that God wanted to stress that his creation was good, very good. Repetition served as the poetic device to capture our attention. It also served notice on anyone who might want to say that creation did not get off to a good start. It was, by God’s own appraisal, “very good.” It was, in fact, Paradise.

Genesis chapter two: THE PROBATION

The emphasis in chapter two now shifts from creation in general to God's relationship with Adam and Eve specifically. They become the focus in the second chapter. The emphasis is on their capacity for free moral choice. This has often been called their probation period. It was a time of testing.

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Genesis 2:16-17 (NIV)

It is important to notice that, while Adam and Eve were free, they were not independent moral agents. They could enjoy freedom and paradise as long as they remained under the provision and the protection of their Creator. They were free, yet at the same time, accountable. Notice that God did not ask them not to eat, but he gave them a command. Failure to follow God's command would later prove to have drastic, eternal consequences.

Genesis chapter three: THE FALL

The serpent used three lies to tempt Adam and Eve. First, the serpent cast doubt on the veracity of God's word: "Did God really say?" Then he moved to the area of God's prescribed consequence for disobedience: "You will not surely die." His third and last statement was meant to portray God as having less than honorable motives: "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The lies were believed and Adam and Eve became their own independent moral agents. They found themselves thrust out from under God's protective covering.

Charles Mackintosh spoke of the deception this way,

Satan had said, "your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil"; but he had left out a material part of the truth, namely, that they should know good without the power to do it, and that they should know evil without the power to avoid it. Their very attempt to elevate themselves in the scale of moral existence involved the loss of true elevation. They became degraded, powerless, Satan-enslaved, conscience-smitten, terrified creatures. "The eyes of them both were opened," no doubt; but, alas! To what a sight! – it was only to discover their own nakedness.¹

Adam and Eve had to live with the startling discovery that they were not really the free moral agents that they thought they would become. They were still accountable to God. There were consequences. They found themselves under a curse and all of creation with them. The saga of the fall ends with what must have been a terribly sad sight: Adam and Eve were banished and driven out of the Garden of Eden. It was death indeed – spiritual death. Physical death would follow in due time.

¹ Charles H. Mackintosh, *Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1972), 31.

An essential part of understanding God's plan of redemption is that we must come to terms with the fact that we are fallen creatures who live in a fallen world. This is the reason we get sick and die. This is the reason why there is crime, war and national calamities. This is the reason for the pain and suffering we see all around us.

TIME OUT

It wouldn't be a bad idea to stop and get alone with your Bible now and read through the first three chapters of Genesis. It would be good to reread them a few more times as you work through this chapter. So much of what is revealed in the first three chapters of Genesis plays a vital role in God's plan of redemption that makes up the remainder of biblical history.

God's plan of redemption and the power of the Christian message is dependent on a clear understanding of the beginnings of human history that are contained in the first three chapters of Genesis. The importance of these chapters cannot be overstressed. Know these chapters well.

There are many interesting truths that are contained in the first three chapters of Genesis, but there is no room to go into much detail now. It is important to have a bird's eye view of these three elements: creation, probation and the fall. As we grow in our understanding it will cause us to marvel as we dig deeper into God's beautiful plan of redemption. Let's take a look at God's plan of redemption and how it has been worked out through history.

OVERVIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

I have divided this overview into three sections: the building of a nation, the making of a covenant and the promise of a new covenant.

The Building of a Nation

The world at large was not interested in a relationship with God as evidenced by the events leading up to the flood and the tower of Babel. God chose to work out his plan of salvation beginning with the calling of one man. That man was Abraham.

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV)

Rather than giving his attention to the whole world, God would now work through one man. From that one man God built a nation. Through this nation God's plan of redemption would reach the whole world. Through Abraham came Isaac, and through Isaac came Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons who made up the twelve tribes of Jacob. (God later changed Jacob's name to Israel). Out of all the nations of earth the Messiah would come from the family of Jacob (Israel). This was the reason that, in God's promise to Abraham, the whole world would be blessed through him: the Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham.

The Making of a Covenant

When it came time for God to give the Promised Land to Israel, he established a covenant with them. This was a covenant that would mark them out as belonging to the one true God in the midst of a world population that served many gods. The Ten Commandments served as a condensation of the laws of the covenant.

*And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."
Exodus 20:1-3 (NIV)*

God introduced himself in the preamble leading into the Ten Commandments. He made it known that he alone was worthy due to his miraculous intervention in rescuing his people out of Egypt. The first commandment was that they should have no other gods before him. The covenant stipulated that God should have exclusive sovereignty over his people. This relationship is what the covenant jealously guarded.

The Ten Commandments have often been reduced to a mere list of do's and don'ts. Perhaps they were suitable to hang on a wall, but that's about it. Take a close look at each commandment and you'll see that there was an overwhelming desire on the part of God to protect and provide for the people who belonged to him. He set out clear moral boundaries for how they were to relate to him as well as how the people should behave toward one another. The Ten Commandments were more than just a list. The issue was essentially about the God behind the list. It spoke of relationship. It was God entering into a covenant relationship with people he called his own. When it came time for the people to ratify the covenant we can read where the people agreed to do everything that God commanded. The covenant was put into action. The LORD would be their God and they would be his people.

The remainder of the Old Testament is the account of how this covenant was kept (or not kept) by the people. The sad fact was that the people could not live up to the terms of the covenant. The lure of the false gods and false worship of the surrounding world was too strong for them to resist. The people eventually found themselves losing the Promised Land. The strength of the covenant depended on the ability of the people to remain faithful. The people were found wanting. The covenant eventually became useless. It was broken beyond repair. However, God proved his faithfulness. Even in the midst of human failure God promised a New Covenant.

The Promise of a New Covenant

As time passed, Israel became a divided nation: Israel to the north (ten tribes) and Judah to the south (two tribes). The prophet Jeremiah was witness to the final collapse by the Babylonian invasion in 586 BC. The northern nation, Israel, had already disappeared over 100 years earlier at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC. The Promised Land was emptied because the people had broken the covenant beyond repair. Read Deuteronomy 28 for insight into the ramifications of either obeying or disobeying the covenant.

God repeatedly warned the people of the inevitability of judgment due to their repeated disobedience. God used the prophet Jeremiah for many of these warnings. In the midst of the cry for judgment there was also a cry of a different sort. There was the cry of the promise of redemption and restoration. It would be the promise of a new covenant.

31 “The time is coming, declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

33 “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying ‘know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”
Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NIV)

One day I was challenged by a person who did not believe that the God of the Old Testament was a God of love. He asked me to show him one place where it could be shown that the God of the Old Testament was a loving God. I took him to this passage in Jeremiah 31. He said no more. Many people have this same misconception about God. They seem to think there are either two gods or that God has somehow changed into a kind and gentler God of the New Testament. Be assured that God does not and has not changed. God’s plan is secure since before the creation of the world. We will see how God will bring his many promises of redemption to historical fulfillment through Jesus Christ.

This first section has dealt with how we got here. That is, how we got ourselves into this predicament as sinful human beings in a fallen world. We were created in the image of God and all was good by God’s own proclamation. Then sin entered into God’s creation and resulted in the fall. We now are fallen beings living in a fallen world. This is where we’ve been. Now, let’s look at where we are going.

Section Two

WHERE WE ARE GOING

The way we are going should be the way God wants us to go. If you are a believer then you have made God's way your way. The rest of the unbelieving world is still saying, "No way." We often recoil because there is something within human nature that recoils at the thought of being told what to do. Maybe you resisted for a long time. I know I did. The message of the Bible tells us that we do not measure up to God's standards and we must submit to his way. This rubs most human beings the wrong way. Let's look at the third chapter from the book of John for more insight.

The Example of Nicodemus

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:1-3 (NIV)

Jesus saw right into the heart of Nicodemus as he deflected Nicodemus' polite greeting and addressed his deepest need instead. Nicodemus was hit broadside by what Jesus had to say about his inability to "see the kingdom of God." If anyone would qualify for kingdom inclusion Nicodemus would be the one. He would have been voted by his peers as "most likely to succeed."

First, Nicodemus was a Jew. Who better to have access to the kingdom of God? As the apostle Paul said about the Jews:

Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenant, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ. Romans 9:4-5 (NIV)

Jesus' statement was not at all what Nicodemus expected to hear. Nicodemus saw himself as one who belonged to the kingdom of God from birth. Jesus said otherwise. If this was true of Nicodemus how much more would this apply to those who were not as privileged?

Second, Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He had attained a level of spiritual authority and holiness that few could ever hope to attain. The people regarded the Pharisees with the highest esteem. Yet, according to Jesus, Nicodemus was still lacking something.

Third, besides being a Pharisee, Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin that was the high court and ruling body of Israel at the time. Most people would certainly not be stretching reality to think that someone with all of this going for him would be able to have a part in the kingdom of God.

Fourth, Nicodemus was a man with a humble heart. He had a good heart. We know this because Jesus opened up to him in a way that he often reserved only for people who were receptive. We have further evidence because Nicodemus later became a disciple. Nicodemus could be considered by human standards: a good man and a genuine nice guy. Nicodemus had every human quality that most people would naturally assume could measure up to God's standards of a good, acceptable man.

We are forced to consider this question: if of all people, Nicodemus could not measure up, who can? The answer is: no one. Nicodemus was a bit troubled by his conversation with Jesus, but he was willing to listen. The problem that faces most people when confronted with their own need is that they are not always as willing as Nicodemus to listen. The central issue of salvation is that it must be God's way: you must be born again.

Jesus informed Nicodemus that, as a descendent of Adam, he was born spiritually dead. He was born spiritually separated from God. He needed to experience the regeneration that could only come from the Holy Spirit. The Old Covenant could do nothing for him. New birth is exclusively a product of the New Covenant. It comes from placing one's trust in Jesus Christ. There is no other way to be "born again."

One Way

There is only one way to God. It is through his provision through Christ.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." John 14:6 (NIV)

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 (NIV)

There are many other Scriptures that can be cited to show that God has only one plan and Jesus is that plan. In the past history of Israel God had an elaborate tabernacle system set up with many rituals and a special priesthood. There was only one tabernacle available and only one priesthood. It would have done no one any good to try to set up their own tabernacle and priesthood system when God himself had already set up his prescribed way. Not only would it make no sense, but also it would be in direct disobedience to God's will. In the same way, Jesus is God's only mediator today.

For there is one God and mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men... 1 Timothy 1:5-6 (NIV)

Selected Scriptures

There are certain Bible passages that lay out the way of salvation. It is important when reading these to realize that the plan of salvation is incorporated in the teaching of the whole Bible that pertains to the New Covenant. However, using isolated passages helps us to locate the truth in a succinct manner. For a fuller teaching on salvation it would be good to read Romans, chapters one through eight, which gives a powerful explanation of the gospel.

Also, read Galatians, chapters one through five. The passages I have listed below will help to give you a quick glimpse into the way of salvation.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. John 1:12-13 (NIV)

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." John 5:24 (NIV)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3:23-24 (NIV)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23-24 (NVI)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Section Three

WHO WE ARE

In this section we will explore two issues: assurance of our salvation and growth in our salvation. A study in these areas places the focus on who we are in Christ. It has to do with our identity. We must come to a correct understanding as to how God sees us in Christ. This will revolutionize our lives and bring untold blessing.

Assurance of Our Salvation

God wants all those who belong to him through Jesus Christ to know that they belong to him. In other words, we are to know we are saved. It's all part of building our relationship with God. We all need to know how God sees us in Christ and have a firm foundation on which to base our relationship with him.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." 1 John 5:13 (NIV)

- Problem #1: "I don't feel saved."

The solution to this problem is to ask yourself the question: "Have I trusted in Christ?" If you can answer, "Yes", then you must learn to take God at his word. Read some of the verses listed earlier and make them apply directly to your life now.

God's plan of salvation goes contrary to human nature. We naturally feel that we must somehow earn right relationship with God. This goes along with the natural thinking: "I don't measure up. I feel guilt. Therefore, I must do something to make myself pleasing to God." It is hard to accept the gospel of grace. We may never feel saved. God would wean us away from dependence on feelings and natural thinking. God's plan is that we all learn what it is to depend on the promises in his word. God's word tells us who we are. Put your faith in God's word and your feelings will soon follow.

- Problem #2: "I still sin."

We may or may not feel saved, but we will always sin. This is a hard lesson that must be learned. It should lead to humility and a life-style of repentance.

*8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. 1 John 1:8-10 (NIV)*

John made it clear in his letter that we all sin. What we need to know is that we must make it our job to confess our sins before God. It becomes a daily way of life for the believer. The key verse wedged between verses eight and ten is verse nine. We must keep short accounts with God by refusing to ignore sin if we have indeed sinned. While our eternal life remains secure in Christ, our communion with God may be damaged by sin. Confession is the way back to open communion with God.

TIME OUT

Write out 1 John 1:9 on a separate piece of paper and memorize it. Confession is agreeing to what God already knows about us. If we know we have sinned, we must confess it to God.

As you take the time to memorize and meditate on 1 John 1:9 you will see that God is faithful and just. He is faithful because he will always do what he has promised. He is just because justice was served on the cross on our behalf. He will even go beyond anything we could hope for. He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Put this promise to work in your life.

Assurance of salvation may take some time and we may even struggle for years. It is crucial, as believers, that our salvation is sure. Assurance of our salvation is the foundation for future growth. Knowing who we are in Christ will help us rest assured in our salvation.

Growth In Our Salvation

To grow in our salvation means to have our relationship with God develop over time. Our relationship with God should become more and more fruitful and satisfying. This is why we can say that salvation is so much more than just having our sins forgiven. We have the never-ending joy of growing and deepening our relationship with God.

*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)*

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. 1 Peter 2:2 (NIV)

“This is to my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” John 15:8 (NIV)

Growth and fruitfulness are a part of our salvation. One of the functions of the church is to help believers grow toward maturity. We will cover this in more detail in the next chapter in *The Christian Basics* when we take a close look at the church.

CONCLUSION

Coming to terms with God’s plan of salvation is not as easy as it might seem at first. It is a free gift, yet very costly. It cost God his Son. It is simple, yet it can be deeper than anyone will ever be able to understand. If it were really easy then it would seem that more people would be saved and our churches would be overrun with people coming to the Lord. But we must not forget that there is a spiritual battle going on for the souls of people. Truth is hard to come by and accepting God’s truth even harder. Think back where we started in this chapter: Genesis. Read how Charles Mackintosh presented the problem of this spiritual resistance.

[There is] the remarkable contrast between the testimony set up in Eden and that which is set up now. Then, while all around was *life*, God spoke of *death*; now, on the contrary, when all around is death, God speaks of life: then, the word was, “in the day thou eatest thou shalt die”; now, the word is, “believe and *live*.” And, as in Eden the enemy sought to make void God’s testimony as to the result of eating the fruit, so now he seeks to make void God’s testimony as the result of believing the gospel. God had said, “In the day that you eatest thereof thou shalt surely *die*”; but the serpent said, “ye shall not surely *die*.” And now, when God’s word plainly declares that “he that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting *life*” (John 3:36), the same serpent seeks to persuade people that they have *not* everlasting *life*.²

² Mackintosh, *ibid.* 27,28.

If you are one of the people in the world who can say without a doubt that you are “saved” then you have participated in one of the greatest miracles of all time. God created the universe at his command. The universe did not have a choice in the matter, nor was it held responsible. He could command a universe into existence, but he will not command rebels to turn to him against their will. He has given us all the dignity of freedom of choice to say “no” to him. The fact that God has so mysteriously worked in our lives to the extent that we would cease to be rebels is one of the greatest miracles of all. This is a reality that should humble us all.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

1. If God knew that Adam and Eve would sin, couldn't he have created them without the ability to sin?

First of all, proposing a “what if?” scenario is useless because it still will not change reality. Gravity causes things to fall toward the earth and sometimes people get hurt. Wishing it were somehow different will not solve the problem. The fact that we live in a fallen world is the reality we all must live with.

God created human beings with a free will. Love demands that free will be exercised. Robots cannot love. We choose to love. What kind of love would it be if people had to be coerced against their will? God gave human beings freedom to choose or to reject him. Adam and Eve rejected God and the results were catastrophic. The good news is that now, through Jesus Christ, the effects of the fall can be reversed. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Anyone can make the choice today and be one of the “whoever’s” of John 3:16. All they have to do is believe in Christ.

2. Isn't it being narrow minded to say that Jesus is the only way to salvation?

The issue is not that of being narrow minded or closed minded, but of what is true. Nobody thinks it is narrow minded to avoid poison. Eat poison and you die. That is the truth. Christianity presents Jesus as the only way. And that's the truth.

There was a TV talk show recently that had on its panel leaders from various religions. Just before a commercial break the confused host turned to the Christian minister who was on the panel and asked him, “Can't the Hindu go to heaven?” They broke to a commercial before he could give an answer.

I would have answered, “Yes. The Hindu can go to heaven if he becomes a Christian by receiving Jesus as his Savior.” However, there is one thing that the talk show host may not have realized when he asked his question: the Hindu does not want to go to heaven. There is no heaven in the Hindu religion. The talk show host had fallen into the error of “pluralism.”

Pluralism is the belief that it is possible to blend all religions into one. Pluralism is the misguided idea that we can cancel out certain beliefs that we do not agree with in order to form a more pleasing belief system.

If the essential elements were eliminated from the various religions then we would no longer have the religions with which we started. We instead would have a religion of our own making. We would have committed a form of religious imperialism by robbing each of their vital teachings against the will of those who follow those teachings. For example, no Hindu would want to give up the belief in many gods or the belief in reincarnation. No Buddhist would be willing to give up the belief that there is no personal god. In the same way, it is not fair to try to eliminate the central core of what makes Christianity Christ-centered. Christianity plainly teaches that Jesus is the only way. The exclusivity of Christ is at the very center of Christianity. There can be no Christianity without the exclusive claims of Christ.

3. How can a God of love send anyone to hell?

The first thing we must understand is that hell is final judgment. It is the final curtain call in God's plan for his creation. It is his last and final act of justice that brings human history to a close. This final judgment is called "the second death" (Revelation 20:14). Remember Adam and Eve? God said to them, "The day you eat of it you shall die." Everybody descendant from Adam is born spiritually dead. This is followed by physical death. The second death is judgment in hell.

We also must understand that love and justice cannot be separated. How could a loving God allow the multitude of horrendous acts that have occurred on this planet go unpunished? The universal cry of the human heart that has existed in every corner of this earth, and for all time, is the cry for justice. It is part of our very being. How then could we not expect God to be just?

Abraham cried out to God as God was about to bring judgment upon the city of Sodom, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right" (Genesis 18:25)? If you will read the remainder of the account you will find that an answer was given to Abraham that fully satisfied him. God is Just and his justice is absolutely perfect.

How would we choose to mete out justice? Perhaps we would start with the most wicked human beings of history. There have been many world leaders such as emperors, kings and dictators who have been responsible for the untold suffering and death of millions of people. Perhaps our justice should be focused on them.

Maybe we should lower the bar of justice so as not to leave out the multitude of mass murderers who have committed their unspeakable acts. Although they have not been involved in political intrigue, they have exacted their own brand of murderous intrigue on their helpless victims. Let them face our judgment.

Let's move the bar a little lower to include people who have robbed and maimed, raped and pillaged innocent victims. Then we might want also to move the standard of justice to include ordinary criminals, abusers, neglectors and all the other social vandals of humanity. Soon, the question will have to arise, "Where will we draw the line?"

The answer is given in the Bible. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God's justice demands all are under condemnation. Let's not forget that the very fact we all die is due to God's judgment on sin. So, we actually live with God's judgment everyday because all die. The very fact that death exists in our world should serve as a reminder that judgment on sin is a reality.

I know the answer to questions pertaining to love and justice can open the door to more questions, but let this answer at least begin to ease your mind that the "Judge of all the earth" will do right. To help you arrive at this place of trust, here's another question to ponder: "Why should God bother to save anyone at all?" If God saved just one person per century he could still be lauded as loving and merciful.

But, the fact is, God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone and wants all people to come to salvation. He himself has paved the way by sending his Son to pay the just price for all people. Now the question becomes, who will bow to his will as it is revealed in the Bible? Much more could be said on this topic. Let me end by quoting from two esteemed Christian writers.

*The center of salvation is the cross of Jesus. And the reason it is so easy to obtain salvation is because it cost so much. The cross is the point where God and sinful man merge with a crash and the way of life is opened – but the crash is on the heart of God.*³

*There will be only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "Thy will be done."*⁴

More questions?

Go to **christianlifetools.org** with your questions. They will be answered ASAP.

Review

1. How well can you summarize the themes of the first three chapters of Genesis?
2. Describe the benefits of Abraham's call in Genesis 12:1-3.
3. How many differences can you name between the Old Covenant and the New?

³ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited: 1935), 97.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Collier Books: 1946), 72.

4. What does it mean to be born again?
5. Name four Scriptures that claim Jesus as the only way to salvation.
6. Recite 1 John 1:9 from memory
7. What would you say to a Christian who didn't feel saved?