

Salvation in Christ: An Alliance Position Paper

Our Greatest Question

What is life all about? That question has haunted and perplexed people for centuries. The answer we receive so often from society is that our lives consist of our status, our appearance and our possessions. Yet many who have devoted their lives to these things have found them unfulfilling and temporary. They have learned well the art of making a living, but have not learned how to live.

Nearly 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ taught that a person's life does not consist of possessions (Luke 12:15). He offered a radically different answer to our nagging question. For more than 100 years The Christian and Missionary Alliance has echoed Christ's answer by proclaiming the words of John when he wrote, "He who has the Son [Christ] has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (I John 5:12). That statement reflects both our greatest problem and God's great solution.

Our Greatest Problem

The Bible reveals that men and women were created in God's image that we might live in a loving relationship with God and enjoy all the blessings that result from that relationship. This fellowship was to endure unbroken for eternity. God told Adam that death would only enter into his experience if he chose to disobey (Genesis 2:17). Adam made that choice, thereby severing his relationship with God, and through him sin and death entered into the human arena. God's image in mankind was marred, resulting in a condition described by the Bible as spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1-3).

A person consists of body, soul and spirit (I Thessalonians 5:23). Our spirits are that part of us which was meant to communicate with God. Since our separation from God through sin, our spirits no longer function in relationship with God. Our spirit is dead. Our bodies and our souls (our emotions, intellect and will) still function, but they are not enlightened and governed by God's Spirit communicating through our spirits. God's Spirit is absent because of sin. Thus, we are not experiencing true life as God intended it to be.

Since that day of Adam's fatal choice, we all have been born with this condition (Romans 5:12). Consequently, all of us sin, in that we live our lives independent of God (Isaiah 53:6). Our lives fall short of reflecting God's glorious image (Romans 3:23). There are no exceptions (Romans 3: 10).

If we die while still in this condition, we are eternally lost and separated from God. We will one day be resurrected in order to be judged for our sin, but there will not be another opportunity for us to be reconciled to God. Hebrews 9:27 states that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." The Bible refers to this state as the second death or Hell (Revelation 20:12-15).

God's Great Solution

We can do nothing independent of God to remedy this dilemma. Ephesians 2:8-9 states that salvation is "not a result of works." As long as we are dead in our sin, living independent of God, our works are never truly good, for they are not initiated at God's command nor carried out by His power and for His glory. Doing good deeds will not restore our spirits to life, for external acts do not alter our internal condition. Our hearts

need to be changed. Likewise, moral deeds do not pay the debt that we owe to God's justice because of our sin. Romans 6:23 reminds us that "the wages of sin is death." Deeds cannot be substituted for death. Only death can truly substitute for death. Consequently, good works do not remove our guilt nor restore our spiritual life. God, in His perfect love, did not leave us hopeless in our predicament. Nor did He simply overlook our guilt, for to do so would have violated His perfect justice. The only solution consistent with His love and justice was the death of Christ in our behalf. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). When Christ died on Calvary, He was not suffering for any sin He had committed. He was the sinless Son of God. Nor was He merely providing mankind with an inspiring example of love. He was laying down His life and immortality of His own will and power so that His death could be the substitute for our judgment (John 10: 17–18). Christ's death was an absolute necessity, for it alone opened the way to reconciliation and peace with God.

In order for a person to be both delivered from the penalty of sin and restored to full humanity, he or she must believe on and confess Christ as his or her Lord (Romans 10:9–10). This involves more than mere verbal assent. It requires repentance, a commitment to turn from sin (Luke 13:3), as well as surrender, a commitment to honor and obey God. It is brought about by the convicting work of God's Holy Spirit (John 6:44; 16:8) and our response in the exercise of faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Faith has been described as "Forsaking All I Trust Him." It is not faith itself which saves us, but the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, the Lord.

When we respond to God's offer of forgiveness and reconciliation, we experience what Jesus referred to as the new birth (John 3:3–8). God's Spirit regenerates our spirit, giving us spiritual and eternal life. We now live in union with Christ. All sin is forgiven, for we are now in Christ. Christ's death for sin covers and removes our debt. The Bible refers to this condition of freedom from condemnation as being "Justified through faith" (Romans 5: 1). We are now ready to experience life, the abundant life Christ offers (John 10:10).

God's Only Solution

God has provided only one way to eternal life, and that is through the One who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Some would contend that God is to be found in all faiths. However, the first chapter of Romans makes it clear that the various human religions do not constitute alternative paths to salvation but rather our suppression of God's truth. In short, they are further examples of our seeking to make our own way, rather than yielding to God's will. Acts 4:12 reaffirms that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Life can only be found in union with "Christ, who is our life" (Colossians 3:4).