

Simple Salvation, Part 1

by Jeremy Cagle

In his book, *Saved from What*, R. C. Sproul tells the following story:

“Are you saved?”

I vividly recall a time more than three decades ago, in 1969, when I was asked this question.

These were the volatile days of the sixties – the era of the cultural revolution in America. I was professor of theology at the Conwell School of Theology on the campus of Temple University in Philadelphia. The days were turbulent, marked by demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. Paroxysms of rage punctuated student protests and shut-ins. The academic world was in a state of unprecedented turmoil and upheaval. I recall trying to lecture above the din of bullhorns outside the classroom as I competed with the S. D. S. (Students for a Democratic Society) for my students’ attention.

One such day I sought an hour’s solace and quietude from this cacophony in the faculty dining room. I stretched my lunch hour to the limit in order to squeeze out every moment of peace I could enjoy.

As the noon hour ended, I deposited my lunch tray in the bin and began my trek across the plaza to my classroom. I was alone, minding my own business. Suddenly, apparently out of nowhere,

a gentleman appeared in front of me, blocking my forward progress. He looked me in the eye and asked directly, “Are you saved?”

I wasn’t quite sure how to respond to this intrusion. I uttered in response the first words that came to my mind: “Saved from what?” What I was thinking, but had the grace not to say, was “I’m certainly not saved from strangers buttonholing me and asking me questions like your’s.” But when I said, “Saved from what?” I think the man who stopped me that the day was as surprised by my question as I had been by his. He began to stammer and stutter. Obviously he wasn’t quite sure how to respond.

“Saved from what? Well, you know what I mean. You know, do you know Jesus?” Then he tried to give me a brief summary of the gospel.

This serendipitous encounter left an impression on me. I experienced real ambivalence. On the one hand, I was delighted in my soul that someone cared enough about me, even though I was a stranger, to stop and ask me about my salvation. But it was clear that, though this man had a zeal for salvation, he had little understanding of what salvation is. He was using Christian jargon. The words fell from his lips without being processed by his mind. As a result, his words were empty of content. Clearly, the man had a love for Christ and a

concern for people. Few Christians have the courage to engage perfect strangers in evangelistic discussion. But sadly, he had little understanding of what he was so zealously trying to communicate.¹

If you have been a Christian for any period of time, you have been on the giving or receiving end of a conversation like that.

“Are you saved?”

“Saved from what?”

“I don’t know!”

There could be many reasons for someone to talk that way,² but whatever the case may be, the fact remains that professing Christians have no excuse for such behavior. First Peter 3:15 says to “always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.” Matthew 28:18 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” You cannot “make a defense” of Christianity or “make disciples of all the nations” without first understanding what Christianity is. And it is the purpose of this article to help you do that.

In this article and the next, we are going to look at 8 things you must have to be saved. If someone is a Christian, he will – on some level – embrace and

understand the following 8 truths. I will list them here and then explain the first 6 in this article.³

1. An Exclusive View of Christianity
2. A High View of God
3. A Low View of Man
4. A Complete View of Jesus Christ
5. A Perfect View of the Cross
6. A Necessary View of the Resurrection
7. A Realistic View of Eternity
8. A Practical View of Salvation⁴

I. AN EXCLUSIVE VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY

The word exclusive means “excluding all others; not shared or divided.”⁵ This is opposed to “inclusive,” which means “taking everything into account”⁶ or “including everything.” Every Christian must have an exclusive view of Christianity. He must, on some level, believe that Christianity is right and every other religion is wrong.

As John MacArthur writes,

As Christians we must understand that whatever opposes God’s Word or departs from it in any way is a danger to the very cause of truth. Passivity toward known error is not an option for the Christian. Staunch intolerance

of error is built into the very fabric of Scripture . . . We can’t tell the world, “This is truth, but whatever you want to believe is fine, too.” It’s not *fine*. Scripture commands us to be intolerant of any idea that denies the truth.⁷

If someone tells you that your Christianity is narrow-minded, that should be received as a compliment. For Jesus said,

Enter through the *narrow* gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is *narrow* that leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matt 7:13–14, italics mine).

An Exclusive View of Christianity is seen in two areas.

First, an exclusive message. Acts 4:8–12 records Peter’s message to some Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them,

“Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

“He is the stone which was rejected by

you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

Peter’s message to these Jews was extremely exclusive: “there is salvation in no one else.”

This is a message repeated all throughout the New Testament. In John 14:6, Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” Second John 9–10 states,

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting.

According to John 14:6, you cannot come to God except through Jesus Christ. According to Second John 9, you cannot come to God without the teaching of Jesus Christ. Because of these and other passages, you must believe an exclusive message.

Second, an exclusive membership. Second Corinthians 6:14–16 tell believers,

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?

Not only does Christianity have an exclusive *message*, it also has an exclusive *membership*. Church membership is not given to everyone. As Paul writes in verse 15, “what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?”

Murray J. Harris comments on Paul’s words in Second Corinthians by saying, “The chief reason why believers are not to enter any syncretistic or compromising relationship with unbelievers is that they belong exclusively to God.”⁸

Contrary to popular belief, the purpose of the church is not to mix the lost and the saved. The purpose of the church is to equip the saved to do the work of ministry – to train believers to use their spiritual gifts. Ephesians 4:11–12 says that God gave the church pastors and teachers “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”

Unbelievers do not belong to Jesus’ church because they do not belong to Jesus. Only those who believe the exclusive *message* can have a part in the exclusive *membership*.

II. A HIGH VIEW OF GOD

George Whitfield once said that “All of us are born Arminians. We then mature to be Calvinists.” What he meant by that is that when we are first saved, we think that the choosing of Jesus Christ is an act of our own free will. Later in the Christian life, we realize that our wills are enslaved to sin,⁹ that God has drawn us to Himself apart from our own works,¹⁰ and that “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”¹¹ Said another way, as we mature in Christ, our understanding of Who God is and how He deals with us grows deeper. It grows *higher*.

In a similar fashion, to be saved, one must have a high view of God. The view grows higher the longer we live as Christians; but to be a follower of Jesus Christ, the sinner must start with an elevated outlook on the person of God. This is demonstrated in two attributes of God.

First, God is holy. Charles Hodge defines God’s holiness as “the moral excellence of God.”¹² Another

theologian defines holiness as God’s “absolute moral perfection.”¹³ The idea that God is holy and that He expects His creation to be holy is repeated all throughout Scripture. Isaiah 6:3 says, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” Psalm 111:9 states that, “He has sent redemption to His people; He has ordained His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name.” Isaiah 57:15 echoes this sentiment,

For thus says the high and exalted One
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,
“I dwell on a high and holy place,
And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly
And to revive the heart of the contrite.”

As well as being an attribute of God, this “absolute moral perfection” is commanded for New Testament Christians. First Peter 1:14–16 says,

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Believers are to be holy just as God is holy. Someone cannot be saved without acknowledging that God contains an absolute moral perfection and that He commands His followers

to adhere to that same standard. Hebrews 12:10 says that “He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.”

Second, God is just. Millard J. Erickson defines God’s justice as

His official righteousness, his requirement that other moral agents adhere to the standards as well . . . The justice of God means that he administers his law fairly, not showing favoritism or partiality.¹⁴

God’s justice is how He maintains His holiness. His absolute moral perfection is guarded by how He “administers his law fairly, not showing favoritism or partiality.” Zechariah 9:9 describes God by saying that “He is just and endowed with salvation.” Psalm 9:16 states,

The Lord has made Himself known;
He has executed judgment.
In the work of his own hands the wicked
is snared.

God’s justice is simple in the way it works: God rewards those who are perfectly holy and He punishes those who are not. He rewards those who live up to His law and He punishes those who break it.

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who may stand in His holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure

heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to
falsehood
And has not sworn deceitfully.
He shall receive a blessing from the
Lord
And righteousness from the God of his
salvation (Ps 24:3–5).

The Psalmist asks the question “who may ascend the hill of the Lord” and answers it by saying “He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”

“Who can enter God’s presence?” David asks. The answer: “The morally perfect.” Those with “clean hands”¹⁵ who have not polluted themselves with sin can enter the presence of the Almighty. They can worship Him and come to Him unhindered. They can enter Heaven.

The question we must ask is, “If that is the case, then who goes to Hell?” “If the morally *perfect* go to Heaven, where do the morally *imperfect* go?” Paul answers that question in First Corinthians 6:9–10,

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul says that the unrighteous / the unholy will not inherit God’s kingdom. Those who have unclean hands cannot approach a perfectly clean God. “Neither fornicators . . . nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” The unholy will not go to Heaven because God will pursue them with justice. Romans 2:5 says

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Who goes to Heaven? The perfectly holy. Who goes to Hell? Everyone else.

God commands that His creation be perfectly holy just as He is perfectly holy. When it does not live up to this standard of holiness, God pursues it with His justice.

III. A LOW VIEW OF MAN

Henry Giles, the 19th century American author once said,

Man is greater than a world – than systems of worlds; there is more mystery in the union of soul with the body, than in the creation of the universe.¹⁶

Man is a truly amazing creature. Composed of body, soul, and spirit;

men have written beautiful poetry and painted astonishing works of art. Men have created space ships, and discovered the cure for smallpox. They have founded empires and discovered continents. Men have even been used by the sovereign God of the universe to write His Scriptures.

But every man has one fatal flaw: sin.¹⁷ Every man has disobeyed God’s law and every man continues to disobey God’s law. We all break God’s holy commandments. To come to grips with the Biblical teaching regarding salvation, we must acknowledge this. One cannot be saved, until he first realizes that he is lost. And one cannot realize he is lost, until he first embraces a *low view of man*.

First, man is universally unholy. Every man is unholy. From the Godliest to the unGodliest of us, from the most moral to the most immoral, every man has violated God’s moral standard for His creation. Romans 3:9–18 declare this truth in striking terms,

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

As it is written,
“There in none righteous, not even one;

There is none who understands,
There is none who seeks for God;
All have turned aside, together they
have become useless;
There is none who does good,
There is not even one.”

“Their throat is an open grave,
With their tongues they keep
deceiving,”

“The poison of asps is under their lips;”

“Whose mouth is full of cursing and
bitterness;”

“Their feet are swift to shed blood,
Destruction and misery are in their
paths,
And the path of peace they have not
known.”

“There is no fear of God before their
eyes.”

Every man has broken God’s holy law and has become unholy in the process. That is why verse 10 says “There is no one righteous, not even one.” Romans 3:23 tells us “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” No one is holy. No one is righteous. No one on his own effort is going to Heaven; every man on his effort is going to Hell. As Steven J. Lawson once aptly put it, “What do you have to do to go to Hell? Nothing. Do absolutely nothing and you will go to Hell.”¹⁸

J. C. Philpot, describing man's misery at this reality, says,

As no heart can sufficiently conceive, so no tongue can adequately express the state of wretchedness and ruin into which sin has cast guilty, miserable man. In separating him from God, it severed him from the only source of all happiness and holiness. It has ruined him body and soul; the one it has filled with sickness and disease; in the other it has defaced and destroyed the image of God in which it was created. It has made him love sin and hate God.¹⁹

And that thought leads to a second component of a low view of man.

Man is entirely unholy. Nothing in man is holy. Man contains no light within himself; no "good" in God's eyes.

And this sin nature was inherited from the first man – Adam. Romans 5:12–14 state,

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned – for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Death came to all men because all men sinned through their representative – Adam. "So death spread to all men, because all sinned." First Corinthians 15:22 summed it up this way, "For as in Adam all die."²⁰

All men die because they are entirely unholy. Unholiness is in man's very nature. It is not that all men always kill, steal, cheat, and lie. We all know "good" men and women who do charitable services to the community, who serve their families as responsible parents and live honorable lives. But the Bible teaches that if we break one of God's laws, we have broken them all. James 2:10–11 teach us,

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

While human beings can live morally respectable lives, the Apostle James teaches that one disobedient act breaks all of God's law. Because of that, man is universally and entirely unholy. The desire to break God's law is in his very nature²¹ and no one is exempt from its control.

And the consequences are tremendous. Every man is destined to Hell because

every man has broken and continues to break God's perfect law.²²

IV. A COMPLETE VIEW OF JESUS CHRIST

There is much debate today on university campuses and in scholastic circles as to Who Jesus Christ truly was. One book describes the dilemma this way:

Interpretations of Jesus are fraught with bias. He's a powerful figure whom people want on their sides – and they're willing to re-create him in their image to enlist support. Animal-rights activists imagine a vegetarian Jesus. New Agers make him an example of finding the god within. And radical feminists strip him of divinity so that Christianity doesn't appear sexist. "Frankly, it's hard to escape the feeling that our culture has taken Jesus' question 'Who do you say I am?' and changed it to 'Who do you want me to be?'"²³

But to be a believer in Jesus Christ, you must first know what *to believe* about Jesus Christ. Here are two things that Jesus claimed about Himself that must be accepted if you are to be a Christian.

First, Jesus Christ was/is fully man. After describing how all men have sinned through Adam, Romans 5:15–17 goes on to state,

But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

In this in-depth look at salvation, Paul compares Jesus Christ to Adam. And the question is: Why? What do they have in common? What does the first man possess that would cause Paul to compare him with Jesus?

And the answer is: sinlessness. Both Jesus Christ and Adam were born without sin. Second Corinthians 5:21 says Jesus "knew no sin" and Genesis 1:31 says that, after creating Adam, "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good."

But where Adam sinned and plunged the whole human race into sin, Jesus Christ lived a sinless human life and brought salvation to the human race. Hebrews 4:15 says,

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus Christ lived His life as a perfect man. He was born. He had human needs. He ate when He was hungry. He drank when He was thirsty. He lived as a teenager. He worked to earn His living. He grew into a man. He was tempted. He was physically weak at times. He was happy. He was sad. He was angry. He was distressed. Yet He did all this without violating any of God's holy laws.²⁴ He was completely without sin.

Second, Jesus Christ was/is fully God. Just as there is no part of Him that is not fully man, there is no part of Jesus that is not fully God. Colossians 1:15 says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Hebrews 1:3 says, "And He is the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of [God's] nature."

Jesus Christ was God walking on earth. In John 14:7, 9 Jesus told one of His disciples "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know

Him, and have seen Him . . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father." In John 10:30, He told some Jews "I and the Father are one." In a sense, Jesus made it clear to His followers, "If you want to know what God Himself looks like, look to Me. I am God."

We do not have the time in this article to go into all the implications of such an amazing claim but let me make two applications of this truth. First, Jesus' Deity explains His perfect holiness. Because He was completely God, He was completely sinless. Jesus was holy just as God is holy.

Second, God's justice would only be satisfied by His punishing the unholy and rewarding the holy. Every man deserves punishment since every man is unholy. Since the fall of Adam, mankind has become entirely and universally unholy. Yet Jesus Christ, being fully God has broken this chain of unholiness. He was born without sin and, unlike Adam, Jesus continued to live a life without sin. He earned what no man could ever hope for: complete perfection before a holy God and the right to enter into Heaven based on His own works.

Every other man *earned* Hell. Jesus Christ *earned* Heaven.

But what did He do with what He earned?

V. A PERFECT VIEW OF THE CROSS

Jesus Christ traded the reward He earned for the punishment sinful men deserved and He did it by being crucified on a cross. This is what theologians call substitution. The authors of the book, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, write this about substitution:

The doctrine of penal substitution states that God gave himself in the person of his Son to suffer instead of us the death, punishment, and curse due to fallen humanity as the penalty for sin.²⁵

Jesus Christ substituted His perfect life for the eternal death of every sinner who would believe in Him and, in return, He gave them His eternal life. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." John 3:14, 16 say, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up . . . that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Romans 5:8–9 state,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet

sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Martin Luther, describing Jesus' work on the cross, summarized it this way:

Christ himself suffered the dread and horror of a distressed conscience that tasted eternal wrath . . . It was not a game, or a joke, or play-acting when he said "Thou hast forsaken me"; for then he felt himself really forsaken in all things even as a sinner is forsaken.²⁶

This allowed God to keep His perfect holiness and justice and yet demonstrate His grace to mankind. God's holiness was maintained in that He did not overlook the sins of men. God's justice was met in that He punished sin. And God's grace was demonstrated by His act of granting life to those who deserved death.

This has also been the wonder of the ages. God dying for the unGodly. God the Father crucifying God the Son so that the morally impure would be made pure. There is no other religion in the world that teaches anything like this.

As a result of Jesus' amazing life and death, Philip Schaff, the legendary church historian wrote "It would take more than a Jesus to invent a Jesus."²⁷

Another author said that Christian salvation and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross is “hard to believe.”²⁸ The Apostle Paul says it this way,

For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor 1:22–25).

To be saved, it is essential that the sinner understands this vital truth. It is essential that he embrace a perfect view of the cross.

First the cross is perfect because it is finished. Hebrews 10:11–14 says this,

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

In writing to the Jews, the author of Hebrews explains to them that Jewish priests had to return to the

temple every day to offer sacrifices for sin. But Jesus Christ has offered “one sacrifice for sins for all time.” His work on the cross is perfect because it is finished. It is over. According to verse 12, Jesus has now “sat down at the right hand of God.”

You cannot be saved if you do not realize this. You cannot be saved if you truly think you must add to Jesus’ sacrifice. His work is done.

Hebrews 9:24–28 say all this another way,

For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered *once to bear the sins of many*, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.²⁹

Jesus Christ has been sacrificed one time for the forgiveness of sins. His

crucifixion is perfect because it is finished. The cross is all we need for salvation and it does not need to be repeated.

Second, the cross is perfect because it is accomplished. Not only is Jesus’ work on the cross perfect because it is finished, it is also perfect because it is accomplished. Jesus’ sacrifice for sins accomplished everything He set out to accomplish. John 6:39–40 says,

This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.

“Once saved, always saved, if saved.”

You cannot lose your salvation because Jesus’ blood is perfect to save. Your perseverance as a Christian is a result of Jesus’ power, not your own. His power is perfect to achieve everything it was designed to achieve. He did not die for those in Hell. He was not offered as a substitute for those who will be eternally damned. As the great Puritan John Owen wrote, “A Saviour of men not saved is strange.”³⁰

Owen went on to write,

To me nothing is more certain than

that to whom Christ is in any sense a Saviour in the work of redemption, he saves them to the uttermost from all their sins of infidelity and disobedience, with the saving of grace here and glory hereafter.³¹

No useless blood was spilt on the cross. Jesus’ death will save everyone it was intended to save. What does Hebrews 10:14 say? “He has *perfected for all time* those who are sanctified.” Jesus’ death on the cross is perfect. It is perfectly finished and it has perfectly accomplished everything it was intended to.

VI. A NECESSARY VIEW OF THE RESURRECTION

While in Seminary, one of our required courses was Apologetics and Evangelism. The Apologetics section I found intriguing. The Evangelism part of the course I found painful. It was painful, not because the teacher did a poor job or because the subject was academically tough, but because it hurt my heart. It made me painfully aware of my limited understanding of Christian salvation and of my past failures at communicating it.

One area that I found particularly challenging was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I knew Jesus rose from the dead after His crucifixion, but how that related to salvation was

always a mystery to me. So I was shocked when our professor assigned us the task of explaining the Gospel in four pages and followed that assignment with this statement: “If you forget to include the resurrection in your paper, I will fail you for this course.”

I knew the resurrection was important, but I never realized it was necessary . . . until that class.

First, the resurrection is necessary to raise believers. In First Corinthians 15:20–24, the Apostle Paul writes,

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at his coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

Not only does Jesus’ death save us from our sins, it saves us in a certain way: it raises us from the dead. Because Jesus Christ was raised, Christians can be assured that they too will be raised from the dead. Verse 21 says

Adam brought death but Jesus Christ has brought us resurrection from the dead. As we all inherited the curse of Adam’s sin, those who will be saved by Jesus will inherit the blessing of His resurrection. He is “the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

The phrase “first fruits” is not familiar to many of us, but in Old Testament times the first fruits were the first crops of a harvest. In Leviticus 23:10, the Lord commands the Israelites,

When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruit of your harvest to the priest.

The Israelites were to bring their first fruits out of trust to the Lord. They gave the Lord the first of their crops to demonstrate that they trusted Him to provide them with more. By giving Him the first, they demonstrated their faith that He would supply the rest.

In a similar way, Jesus Christ is “the first fruits of those who are asleep.” As Christians, we are assured that we will be raised from the dead because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead before us. He is our “first fruits.” As Gordon D. Fee writes,

By calling Christ the “firstfruits,” Paul is asserting by way of metaphor that

the resurrection of the believing dead is absolutely inevitable; it has been guaranteed by God himself.³²

In fact, our salvation and Jesus’ resurrection are so closely tied together that in First Corinthians 15:17, Paul writes “and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.” If Jesus has not been raised to life, the wages of our sins (death) have not been paid and we are left to pay them ourselves. His resurrection is *necessary* to raise us life. If He did not rise again to life, then we could not do the same. The same power that raised Him from the dead will one day raise us to be with Him in glory.

As John Stott writes,

His was a resurrection, not a resuscitation. We believe that he passed miraculously from death into an altogether new sphere of existence . . .

It was the resurrection which transformed Peter’s fear into courage, and James’ doubt into faith. It was the resurrection which changed the Sabbath into Sunday and the Jewish remnant into the Christian church. It was the resurrection that changed Saul the Pharisee into Paul the apostle, the fanatical persecutor into a preacher of the very faith he previously tried to destroy. “Last of all,” Paul wrote “. . . he appeared also to me.”

These are the evidences for the resurrection. The body had disappeared. The graveclothes remained undisturbed. The Lord was seen. And the disciples were changed. There is no adequate explanation for these phenomena other than the great Christian affirmation “the Lord is risen indeed.”³³

What made such a change in the disciples? What was it that converted the hard-hearted Saul into the soft-hearted Paul? It was the awesome realization that, whatever happens in this life, there is a resurrection in the life to come. How did they know this? Because they had seen a risen Jesus.

To be saved, not only must we believe that Jesus died for our sins, we must also believe that He rose again to give us life.

Second, Jesus’ resurrection is necessary to raise creation. At first glance, it would not seem that this would be something a person must believe to be a Christian. And I would say that, yes, someone could be saved and not believe that God’s creation will be resurrected. But, on the other hand, our eternal reward as Christians will take place in a resurrected creation. If the creation is not resurrected through the power of Jesus Christ, we will have no eternal reward to speak of.

Several passages speak of the resurrection of creation. Romans 8:18–23 describe the pain of creation as it waits to be raised again:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

The Apostle Peter in Second Peter 3:10–13 writes,

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming

of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

Why is this? Why does there need to be a resurrected creation? What is wrong with the current one?

Our sin does not only result in death, it also has brought a curse on creation. In Genesis 3:17, the Lord tells Adam the consequences of his disobedience:

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying ‘You shall not eat from it’;

Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.”

God cursed the ground because of man’s sin and, in order for our resurrected bodies to have a suitable dwelling place, this cursed creation must be resurrected. The old one must be destroyed and a new one created.

God cannot exist in a place of sin and this creation is burdened and saturated with the results of our

rebellion against God. In order for the Lord of Heaven and earth to dwell among men,³⁴ a new creation must be formed. A new heavens and a new earth must be created that have been untainted by our law-breaking. Consequently, in order for us to spend eternity with our creator, this creation must be resurrected. As the authors of *Pierced for Our Transgressions* write,

The problem of our sin runs so deep that we cannot and will not save ourselves. Sin is decreational and only the Creator can recreate his world. Yet he must do this in a manner that upholds the goodness and truth of his world.³⁵

Jesus’ resurrection is necessary for Christian salvation. It is necessary because, through it, believers will be raised from the dead. And it is necessary because, through it, a new heavens and a new earth will be resurrected from this old one.

CONCLUSION

Six view and two sections under each one; and there are two more to go. That may not seem too “simple” to a casual reader, but these eight points are all basic to the Christian faith. Remove one and the Biblical teaching regarding salvation collapses.

That is what makes them simple. Each one is part of a system of truths

presented in the Scriptures called “salvation.” You can almost look at each as one piece in an 8-piece puzzle. Leave out a section and it no longer makes sense.

Part 2 of this article will introduce two more views and explain how Christians are to live their lives as a result of these truths.

End Notes

- 1 *Saved from What?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2002) 13–14.
- 2 For example, someone could have trouble evangelizing due to confusion or ignorance. A believer may not be able to communicate certain Biblical truths because they do not fully understand them or because they have trouble relaying them in a discussion. A professing Christian may also have trouble evangelizing due to sinful reasons: unbelief or hypocrisy. How many young people have been coerced into propagating a faith they have yet to embrace? How many church members have evangelized from the motives of guilt and shame rather than love and compassion? This is often the result of a church failing to make sure that the *evangelizing* have been properly *evangelized*. A lost person will most likely find it difficult to explain a Gospel that they do not believe.
- 3 For A Real View of Eternity and A Practical View of Salvation, see “Simple Salvation, Part 2” in this edition of /jst/.

- 4 Let the reader understand that this list and these two articles are not intended to be quick explanations of the Gospel, but a comprehensive explanation of what it means to be saved.
- 5 *Webster's New World Dictionary*, ed. by Michael Agnes (New York: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2003) 227.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 327.
- 7 *Why One Way? Defending An Exclusive Claim in An Inclusive World* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002) 60.
- 8 2 *Corinthians* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 360.
- 9 John 8:34.
- 10 Ephesians 2:8–9.
- 11 Ephesians 1:4.
- 12 *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003 ed.) 413.
- 13 The phrase “absolute moral perfection” comes from A. H. Strong’s *Systematic Theology*.
Unfortunately, I do not have Strong’s page reference for this definition.
- 14 *Christian Theology*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004 ed) 315.
- 15 Peter C. Craigie & Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1–50* in *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004 ed) 213. Marvin E. Tate helps elaborate on David’s expression “clean hands” by saying that “The qualifications for worship are elaborated in moral terms, rather than ritual terms. The worshipper must have ‘innocent hands and a pure heart’; that is, he must have maintained moral integrity with respect to both actions and thoughts.”
- 16 *The New Dictionary of Thoughts*, compiled by Tryon Edwards (Standard Book Company, 1959) 384.
- 17 Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001) 182. Millard J. Erickson defines sin as “Any act, attitude, or disposition that fails to completely fulfill or measure up to the standards of God’s righteousness. It may involve an actual transgression of God’s law or failure to live up to his norms.”
- 18 10:30 a.m. Sermon at Grace Community Church 2/19/06.
- 19 Quoted in A. W. Pink’s *The Doctrine of Human Depravity* (Pensacola, Fl.: Chapel Library, n.d.) 5.
- 20 It is not the purpose of this article to go into great detail regarding the doctrine of total depravity and the transmission of original sin. A good book to help explain some of this teaching is A. W. Pink’s *The Doctrine of Human Depravity*, specifically pages 80–86. A quote from this book may help here,
the guilt of Adam’s offense was imputed to all his posterity because he served as their covenant head and federal representative. Since they were legally one with him, the punishment passed upon him falls upon them too, involving them

in all the dire consequences of his crime (80).

One consequence of Adam’s crime that falls upon every man is death. “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it *you will surely die*” (Gen 2:16–17, italics added). Romans 6:23, echoing this says, “For the wages of sin is death.”

- 21 Romans 7:18–20.
- 22 For a description of Hell, see “Simple Salvation, Part 2” in this edition of /jtst/.
- 23 Robert M. Bowman, Jr. & J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007) 17.
- 24 If you are wondering how Jesus could have lived a sinless life while everyone else inherited the sins of Adam, the answer is His virgin birth. His father was not Adam, but God Himself. He was born *in holiness*, not in sin. For an account of the virgin birth, see Luke 1–2.
- 25 Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, & Andrew Sach, 21. This is an outstanding work on the doctrine of substitution.
- 26 Quoted in J. I. Packer & Mark Dever’s *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2007) 95, footnote 44.
- 27 *History of the Christian Church*, Volume I (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002 ed) 109.
- 28 See John MacArthur’s *Hard to Believe* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2003). The back cover of this books states, Too many people just want a Madison Avenue Jesus to make them well, make them happy, and make them prosperous. But Jesus Christ isn’t a personal genie. He is the Savior. He died in agony to satisfy the wrath of a holy God and to forgive the sins of humankind. Faith in Him demands a willingness to make any sacrifice He asks. The hard truth about Christianity is that the cost is high, but the rewards are priceless: abundant and eternal life that comes only from faithfully following Christ.
- 29 Italics mine.
- 30 *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007 ed) 215.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 32 *The First Epistle to the Galatians* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987) 749.
- 33 *Basic Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971 ed) 52–53, 58–59.
- 34 See Revelation 21:1–4.
- 35 Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, & Andrew Sach, 117.