

Intercontinental Church of God

8. Salvation

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Salvation is the means by which God, through Christ, saves man from the penalty of sin and gives him eternal life. This process includes one's calling, repentance, baptism, justification, receiving of the Holy Spirit, a life of faith and obedience and final birth into God's kingdom as a spirit being. Salvation is a freely given gift from God through grace, with our ultimate reward being according to our works.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The goal of every Christian is to be saved from the death penalty of sin through the sacrifice of Christ and to receive the gift of eternal life in God's family and kingdom. This goal and the process by which it is attained is called salvation. It is the ultimate purpose of life and the explicit reason why mankind was created.

God created man in His image and after His likeness. But the creation process will not be complete until mankind is perfected spiritually—has perfect godly character created in him—and actually enters the God family. God initiates this process by "calling" a person—opening his mind to understand, grasp and be convicted by the truth of the Bible. It is impossible for anyone to come to Christ unless the Father calls him (John. 6:44), and God's calling "depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

If one responds to the realization of God's truth by believing it, committing oneself to it and by acting upon it, God will then grant him the miracle of true repentance (Rom. 2:4). Repentance is the state of mind which an individual attains through seeing and acknowledging his past sinful way of life, and by recognizing that he has broken God's laws (Rom. 3:23; I John. 3:4) and resolving to do so no longer. Repentance, includes both a deep ("godly") sorrow over past wrongs (2 Cor. 7:10) and a steadfast determination to change the whole direction of one's life from disobedience to obedience of God. It is accompanied by a profound realization of the need for forgiveness and the help and strength of God to change.

Once a person has repented and professed a sincere faith in the person, message and sacrifice of Christ, he may be baptized by immersion for the forgiveness of sins. This baptism is a type of Christ's death, burial and resurrection, which is our means of reconciliation to God (Rom. 5:10) since He paid the death penalty for our sins. Baptism symbolizes the death and burial of one's old sinful way of life and the beginning of a totally new spirit-led life of obedience and submission to God. After baptism the new convert receives the Holy Spirit through the laying-on-of-hands ceremony performed in accordance with the commands and examples of the apostles (Acts 8:12-17; 19:5-6).

God's Spirit is an absolute necessity for the spiritual creation process of salvation as it serves many functions. It begets one as the son of God; it strengthens him to face trials and tests, to overcome problems and to build godly character, and it converts and changes the person's whole direction of mind from being carnal to being spiritual (Rom. 8). As such, the Holy Spirit is the seed of eternal life within us which at the resurrection will overtake our mortality with immortality and clothe us with eternal life (Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:1-5). It is the guarantee to a Christian of eternal life which can only be negated by willful neglect or deliberate rejection.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is clearly the focal point of the salvation process. He was "put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). We "were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10) and are thereby justified through faith in that reality (Rom. 5:1). Yet salvation must go beyond

justifying the past, it must continue into the future throughout one's life. The true Christian is admonished to "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Indeed, the active participation of Jesus Christ in one's life through His Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for ultimate salvation. As Romans 5:10 concludes "much more, being reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life.*"

This whole salvation process is by "grace" (Greek "favor"—Eph. 2:8)—It is unmerited and freely given by God and cannot in any way be earned. The Christian totally depends upon God's grace, initially for the forgiveness of sins he may commit subsequent to baptism. Nevertheless, the individual must meet certain criteria in order to be given this free gift.

First, the person must live by and grow in faith—a total and real conviction. One must have faith that God exists; faith that He will perform all of His biblical promises including that of granting him salvation (Rom. 4); faith that the death of Jesus Christ will pay the penalty for one's sins and reconcile him to God; and faith that the resurrection of the living Jesus Christ will enable him to attain eternal life.

Furthermore, a Christian must not be disobedient, since continual sin that is not repented of disqualifies one from God's kingdom. (I Cor. 6:9-11). Salvation is surely not earned by obedience, because salvation can in no way be earned (cf Rom. 4:4). Nevertheless, Christ's response to one who asked Him what must be done in order to be saved was that the commandments must be kept (Mt. 19:17). Furthermore, Christ told His disciples that at the resurrection He shall "reward every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12).

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 also illustrates why obedience and good works are necessary. Although salvation itself is a totally freely given gift (and hence is "by grace"), our individual responsibilities within God's family and kingdom shall vary according to the way we have lived our lives since baptism. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 shows plainly that we will receive responsibilities in direct proportion to the way we have conducted our lives.

Today, God is calling a relative few, but now is not the only day of salvation. Every human being who has ever lived shall have an opportunity for the greatest free gift that could ever be imagined. God wants all mankind to receive the opportunity for salvation (I Tim. 2:4) and is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). To this end God is infinitely patient and has apportioned a time for all human beings from all times to be called to Him and to the ultimate gift of eternal life in the family of God.

In summary, salvation is by grace, through faith, not earned by obedience but dependent upon obedience, with the degree of our ultimate reward being according to our works. This salvation process is thus one which entails our continuance in God's way and necessitates our endurance to the end (Mt. 10:22; 24:13). Only when that process is complete and we have been born as spirit beings into the family of God shall salvation have been completely and totally achieved.

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This publication is intended to be used as a personal study tool. Please know it is not wise to take any man's word for anything, so prove all things for yourself from the pages of your own Bible.

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