

Salvation: The Only Solution



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 2:25; Jer. 17:9; Titus 1:1, 2; Rom. 3:19–24; Acts 2:36–38; Luke 7:47; Eph. 2:1–5.*

Memory Text: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (*John 3:16, NKJV*).

Key Thought: The sin problem is very big; how thankful we should be that the solution was big enough to solve it.

The “sin problem” refers to the crisis caused by the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which brought to the earth the great controversy between good and evil. God’s part in the controversy has been to stop, and ultimately eliminate, the deleterious effects of sin, not just on the earth but on the creation as a whole. God’s action to rescue the creation from the destructive results of sin constitutes the doctrine of salvation. And though that battle, at least in terms of salvation, does play out here on earth, the great-controversy motif has shown us that the issues are, literally, universal.

The doctrine of salvation primarily concerns God and His work to save us, of course. But humanity has an important role too. Yes, God has made an incredible provision for the salvation of the human race. Our crucial part comes in the answering of the question, What will be our response to that provision? On that answer, the eternal destiny of souls truly hinges.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 27.*

The Scope of the Problem

Because salvation is God’s solution to the problem created by sin, the extent of sin’s damage determines the scope of the solution. After all, it wouldn’t be a solution if it was unable to solve the problem, no matter what the size of the problem.

What do the following texts reveal about the scope of the sin problem? How have you experienced it yourself or seen around you the reality of these texts?

John 2:25 _____

Ps. 59:2 _____

Jer. 17:9 _____

Rom. 5:12 _____

James 5:1–7 _____

Isa. 5:23 _____

2 Thess. 2:10 _____

Who among us hasn’t known deeply, personally, and painfully just how bad the sin problem is? We live every moment of our lives with the reality of sin and its effects. Every aspect of human existence on this planet is, to some degree (a great one, in fact), dominated by the reality of sin. From politics to the innermost recesses of the human heart, sin has infected humanity. It is so bad that, without a divine solution, there would be no solution. How grateful we should be that the solution has been given. It’s called “the plan of salvation,” and its purpose is to solve the problem of sin.

God’s Provision: Part 1

The effects of sin did not wait for a “grace period.” The results of sin were immediate and needed immediate attention. It was necessary, therefore, for some kind of provision to be in place when sin manifested itself. Ellen G. White expresses it so clearly: “As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew that He would have to suffer, yet He became man’s substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1084.

What do the following texts tell us about the plan of salvation and when it was established? What great hope and promise can we take from the texts ourselves?

Titus 1:1, 2 _____

Eph. 1:3–5 _____

2 Thess. 2:13, 14 _____

Rev. 13:8 _____

Dwell on the implications of these texts. What are they saying? Basically, from eternity, provisions had been made by God for the problem of sin. Though God did not foreordain that sin would occur (if He had, He would be responsible for it—a horrific and blasphemous idea), He knew that it would; so, back in eternity He made the provision to meet it.

This is biblical predestination, which is radically different from “predestination” as is commonly understood. It was God’s plan, from eternity, that all human beings would have salvation in Jesus. The fact that some reject this salvation doesn’t annul the force or the breadth of the provision. It only adds to the tragedy of what it means to be lost in the face of what has been done for us.

Dwell on the amazing truth that, from eternity, God’s plan was for you, personally, to have salvation. Think about what that means. In what way should a truth like this impact your life?

God’s Provision: Part 2

Throughout salvation history—from the first gospel promise (*Gen. 3:15*) through the early sacrificial system (*Gen. 4:4*), the covenant with Abram (*Gen. 12:1–3*), and the Israelite sanctuary service (*Exod. 25:8*)—everything was to point to, and climax in, the life, death, resurrection, and heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ, God’s ultimate provision to solve the sin problem.

The seriousness of the sin problem can, perhaps, be best understood only when we grasp just what it took—the Cross—in order for it to be solved. The Cross alone proves the utter futility of humanity to solve the sin problem by itself. An extreme situation called for an extreme solution, and the death of Christ, *God bearing in Himself our sins*, is about as extreme a measure as could possibly be imagined.

Christ’s sacrificial death is presented in Scripture as an atonement for sin (the means by which the sin problem in all its manifestations is ultimately dealt with). How does the death of Christ provide for humanity’s need of salvation? Explore this question from the following perspectives:

1. Justification/Reconciliation (right standing before God): *See Luke 18:9–14; Isa. 53:4–7; Rom. 3:19–24, 28; Zech. 3:1–4.*

2. Sanctification/Regeneration (living right before God): *See 1 Cor. 6:8–11, Rom. 6:1–8.*

3. Glorification (assurance of resurrection to eternal life): *See John 5:24, 25; 1 John 5:9–13; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17.*

Dwell more on the fact that sin is so bad that it took the Cross to save us from the ultimate result, eternal death. How should keeping the Cross before us at all times be a deterrent to sin?

The Experience of Salvation: Part 1

The sinner is justified and reconciled on the objective basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice for all (*Rom. 5:6–10*). However, the provision that God has made for the justification and reconciliation of humankind to Himself through the death of Christ needs to be brought into the experience of the believer. It is not enough to just have a theoretical knowledge about justification. We need to experience what it means for ourselves.

Acts 2:36–38 and Acts 3:19 bring up repentance as the beginning of the sinner's experience of salvation. How does the nature of repentance as a feeling of remorse help us to connect the experience of justification with the death of Christ?

Ponder the following comment: “Nothing so touches the depths of the soul as a sense of Christ's pardoning love. When sinners contemplate this unfathomable divine love, displayed on the cross, they receive the most powerful motivation possible to repent. This is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (*Rom. 2:4*).”—Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 135, 136.

Read Romans 3:23–25 and Ephesians 2:8. What is the role of faith in the experience of justification?

We are told in the Bible that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (*Rom. 10:17*). We have also seen that contemplating the love of Christ motivates a person to repentance. Repentance, then, is not the special prerogative of a privileged few. In view of these facts, the importance of the study and the contemplation of God's Word in the experience of justification cannot be overemphasized.

It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance and justification. Thus, if I should repent of sin and experience justification, God is the one to receive the credit. Salvation, then, is truly a gracious gift from God, for, indeed, it is by grace through faith that we are saved (*Eph. 2:8*).

What are some tangible and practical ways in which you may flood your heart and mind with the goodness of God, especially as you think of what He has done for you and what He has spared you from?

The Experience of Salvation: Part 2

The experience of justification places within the life of the believer spiritual realities that initiate change in the person’s life. In justification, the sinner is forgiven (*Luke 7:47, Eph. 1:7, Rom. 4:7*), acquitted of the charges of sin and reckoned righteous (*Rom. 5:16, 18; Rom. 8:1*), and given the gift of a new life (*Eph. 2:1–5, 2 Cor. 5:17*).

The foundation of this new experience is the reality that, no matter our past, no matter our sins, no matter how faulty and wrong we have been, we can stand pardoned, forgiven, and cleansed before God.

Think through what this means. Christ’s death covers all sin, even the worst; no matter how much your own heart might condemn you (*1 John 3:20*), when you surrender yourself to Christ, in faith, and accept His perfect life instead of your own “filthy rags” (*Isa. 64:6*), then you are at that moment covered in Christ’s righteousness. His perfect life is credited to you as if it were yours. Talk about a gift, especially to a sinner!

The question is, How can something like this happen to a person and that person not be radically changed? That change, often called the “new birth,” is part and parcel of the experience of salvation.

Read the texts in the above paragraphs and summarize their teachings about justification and the ways in which we experience it in our own lives.

The experience of forgiveness ends the sinner’s vulnerability to God’s wrath and clears away any barriers to reconciliation and fellowship between God and humans. A new life opens up for the sinner, who then has the privilege of living in fellowship with Christ under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance is the prerequisite for entering into the experience of forgiveness and justification, and it comes accompanied by confession and baptism (*Acts 2:38, 1 John 1:9*). This helps to explain the fact that although forgiveness is available to all, not all will be forgiven.

Where would you be if you couldn’t lean on the promise, every moment of your life, that your acceptance with God is based on what Jesus has done for you and not on yourself or your own performance and law-keeping?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “‘God With Us,’ ” pp. 19–29, in *The Desire of Ages*; Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation,” pp. 271–313, in Raoul Dederen (ed.), *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*.

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal’ (Rom. 16:25, R.V.). It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. . . . God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Think about how bad sin must be that it took the death of the Creator Himself to solve it. What does the Cross reveal to us about the utter inability of humanity to save itself? What do we think we could add to what has already been done for us?
- ❷ Some believe in what is called the “subjective atonement,” the idea that nothing about the Cross changed our standing with God. They claim that the whole point of the Cross was to change our attitude about God, nothing more. What’s terribly deficient about such a theology? What does it say about the problem of sin if all it would take is an “attitude adjustment” on our part to solve it?
- ❸ How possible is it to have a good deal of knowledge about salvation and yet not the experience of it? What do you make of Ellen G. White’s comment that “consecration to God must be a living, practical matter; not a theory to be talked about, but a principle interwoven with all our experience”?—*Our High Calling*, p. 243. How do we, on a daily and practical level, live out the experience of salvation?
- ❹ Dwell on the role of salvation in the context of the great controversy. Why does Satan want to keep as many people as possible from having salvation in Jesus? What are the means he uses against us, and how can we defend ourselves against them?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 3:16*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Outline both the devastating results of sin and the solution that God has provided.

Feel: Sense the goodness and magnitude of Christ's pardoning love and the forgiveness, justification, and restoration that He makes possible.

Do: Repent and experience the new life that comes with acceptance of Christ's sacrifice.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Large Problem, Large Fix

A How has sin changed human nature and life in this world as well as in the universe?

B What was God's solution to sin? When in the course of eternal history was this solution provided, and what power does it have to fix the problem?

II. Feel: Overwhelming Goodness

A Why is it important for each follower of Christ to consider, on a daily basis, his or her great need as a sinner?

B Why is it also important to ponder, on a daily basis, what Christ has done on the sinner's behalf by His death on the cross?

C How does responding to God's loving sacrifice and accepting the forgiveness, justification, and restoration that He makes possible, change the human heart?

III. Do: Repent and Believe

A What does God ask the sinner to do in response to Christ's sacrifice?

B How can the sinner be assured of salvation?

► **Summary:** Without a Savior, we would face eternal destruction because of sin. However, God has provided a perfect, all-encompassing solution through the sacrifice of Christ, which, if accepted, provides forgiveness, justification, and restoration.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Through Christ’s death on the cross, God provided the ultimate and only solution to the problem of sin. Without God’s way, there is no way out of sin.

Just for Teachers: Of the many questions that confront human existence, one of the most perplexing is “Who am I?” (2 Sam. 7:18, NKJV). The world in all its confusions either tempts us to exalt ourselves or to plunge ourselves into the depths of despair. What is the problem with either of the world’s responses, and what is the answer? Our lesson this week will focus on this issue.

Opening Activity: Who am I? Many answers are possible, but consider these four. First, the philosopher says, “The unexamined life is not worth living. Knowledge is power, and it is power that makes or breaks me.” Second, the “primitive” person answers in terms of tribal identification. “I find my security in my group; no one else matters.” However, the trouble with such primitiveness is that it never gets beyond the cave of self-interest. Third, consider the “mundane.” In the world of the mundane, my identity—be it in business, politics, or profession—is in myself. Power becomes my focus. In the sentence of life, the subject is “I,” the verb is “am,” and the object is “me.” I am me. Nothing else matters.

None of these answers will suffice. Thus, we turn to the Cross. There we see our status: a sinner sought by God. At the cross, the sinner sees one person: “the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV). With that perspective, I can affirm that I am not a cosmic accident in this universe. I am not the climax of an evolutionary process. I am not a cog in a giant machine, moving in a meaningless cycle. I am a child of God gone astray.

Discuss: Why is it that the most satisfactory answer to the human predicament can be arrived at only when it is studied in light of going astray from, and coming back to, the foot of the cross?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The Bible describes the act of “going astray” as sin—leaving the will of God, rebelling against His law, rejecting His

rightful claims, and asserting self. With heaven as the point of departure and being with sin the downward plummet away from this ideal, this descent has a vertical dimension. However, “going astray” also brings a horizontal relational break—across family and community, expressed in terms of pride, jealousy, unkindness, and other such acts. Lead the class in a general discussion about both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of sin.

Overview: Approaches to dealing with sin are varied. Some would deny sin. Others would equate sin to a biological mishap, a sociological accident, or a psychological underdevelopment. Still others would argue for a moral deficiency or economic deprivation. But what does the Bible say? This week’s lesson points to the nature of sin, to what God has done about it, and to what we need to do.

I. Sin: Its Nature and Essence (*Read Romans 7:23–25 with your class.*)

Sin is an intrusion. The Bible begins with the portrait of sin as an intrusion into God’s perfect creation, which was brought about by the choice of our first parents to cast their lot on the side of Satan as opposed to the side of God (*Genesis 3*). The Bible ends with the judgment of God destroying sin and Satan and creating a new heaven and a new earth (*Rev. 20:11–15, 21:1–5*). In between the opening and the closing, the Bible narrates sin’s history as it is played out in the lives of individuals and nations.

Sin is a rebellion against God. In heaven sin began with Lucifer’s rebellion against God (*Isa. 14:12–15, John 8:44*). On earth, it began with the disobedience of Adam and Eve (*Genesis 3, Rom. 5:12*). “Sin is the transgression of the law” (*1 John 3:4*). Thus, sin is not simply a wrongful act—as in driving through a red light—but an actual revolt against God (*Ps. 51:4, Isa. 1:2*). Moreover, it is both a refusal to be subject to Him (*Rom. 8:7*) and a choice to live in enmity with Him (*Rom. 5:10, Col. 1:21*).

Sin is universal and leads to death. “All have sinned,” and all are subject to death (*Rom. 3:23, 6:23*). Isaiah gives a grim prognosis of human depravity: “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it” (*Isa. 1:5–7, NKJV*). The meaning is clear: the whole person—physical, mental, spiritual, emotional—is sin-polluted (*Rom. 1:23–25; 7:23–25; 5:8, 12*), and with us the entire creation groans under the weight of evil (*Rom. 8:22*). Thus, a depraved humanity, an estranged fellowship, and a groaning nature are witness to a universe in battle with the forces of sin.

Consider This: Sin is not simply a revolt; it is a refusal and a choice. What are we refusing when we choose sin? To what extent has sin polluted the human race, and what is the only cure?

II. Sin: What Has God Done? (Read *John 3:16* with your class.)

In one mighty text, the Bible summarizes what God has done in order to deal with the problem of sin: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (*John 3:16, NKJV*). God’s giving of His Son to die on the cross was neither accidental nor an afterthought; it was conceived in His mind “even before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4–7*).

God’s provision for the sin problem is both redemptive and surgical. It is redemptive in that God has provided for the redemption of humanity from sin through the Cross of Christ, which reconciles God with humanity (*2 Cor. 5:19*). It is surgical in that it looks forward to an end time when sin and its results will be completely wiped away from earth, giving way for the creation of “new heavens and a new earth” (*Isa. 65:17*).

Consider This: How does the Cross reveal to the universe both the true curse of sin and the true meaning of life?

III. Sin: What We Need to Do (Read *Ephesians 2:8* with your class.)

We can do nothing on our own to save ourselves. The doctrine that we can save ourselves by our good works or rituals is as old as sin itself. The Cross, not the fig leaf, is the solution to the problem. “The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion. . . . Satan had implanted this principle. Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 35, 36.

Christ alone is our Redeemer. To speak this truth is not a result of spiritual arrogance or doctrinal pride but is an acknowledgment of the uniqueness of what happened on the Cross. God’s chosen way of dealing with sin, through the manifestation of His grace, cost the life of His Son. “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With his stripes we are healed.’ ”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

Thus, it must be noted that God’s love and grace have made possible our salvation through the Cross (*John 3:16, Rom. 1:16, Eph. 2:8, Titus 2:11*). Our

part is to believe and accept what God has done through Christ. As sinners all we need to do is to come in faith to the Cross. There we must see in Him our Substitute. We must repent of our sins and acknowledge that He died for us (*Mark 1:15, Acts 3:19, 16:31, Rom. 5:8, 14:15*). Through faith in Him, we have forgiveness of sin and redemption (*Eph. 1:7, 8*), justification (*Gal. 2:16*), and “righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (*1 Cor. 1:30, NKJV*). Nothing essential to a new life is spared, and we become the children of God (*Rom. 8:14*). We receive the gift of eternal life (*Rom. 5:21, 6:23, 1 John 2:25*).

Consider This: Why is the doctrine of salvation by works so dangerous? How does it seek to undermine the theology of the Cross—that we can be saved only through Christ?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Every religion requires its followers to do good either as a means to gain salvation or to escape a cycle or two in the process of reincarnation. But in Christianity, salvation cannot be earned by works. Ellen G. White writes that the robe of righteousness, “woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 311. In Christ, God accepts us as we are, forgives our sins, empowers us to do good, and adopts us as His children. We sing, therefore, “In the Cross of Christ I Glory.”

Application Questions:

- 1 How can you make the Cross central to your life?
- 2 What is the responsibility of the children of God to His other children, both within and outside the saving fold?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: The redemptive experience makes it possible for us to have a transformed mind that can look at life and its environment from a perspective of holistic conformity with God’s original plan.

Activity: In view of such a redeemed experience, how will you relate to those around you—to your neighbor who has a different faith, to your co-worker who often seems disagreeable, and to those who differ from you in culture, politics, or race?