

# Salvation Process

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May the grace and peace of God be upon you!

When Jesus Christ came to this Earth He gave a new message to the world, even though the message had been planned and prepared since Creation. We call it the **Gospel**. The Gospel simply means “good news.” The good news that Jesus brought to the world was that by His sacrifice and by trusting in Him, you may obtain eternal life. For in 1 John 2:25 we read, “*And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.*”

Eternal life is something that most humans aspire to in virtually all religions and cultures. Immortality is something that has captivated the minds of everyone throughout the history of humanity. That’s why we hear of the legends of the Fountain of Youth or scientists coming up with a way to try to prevent aging—sometimes people even go to the extent of planning to cryogenically freeze themselves after they die, trusting in science that they will be able to come back to life in the future. But the only one we can truly trust to give us eternal life is Jesus the Messiah!

Most people don’t want to die. That could be for many reasons. It could be because we are fearful of the unknown or any other reason. The reality is, though, that most people desire eternal life—it’s natural. But the Bible is clear that the penalty of sin is death as we read in Romans 6:23, “*The wages of sin is death.*” Death is the righteous judgement for sin because sin separates us from God. Sin brings suffering, and God (who is perfect and doesn’t sin) doesn’t desire His creation to suffer thru sin. Therefore, sin must cease to exist, and anyone who desire to live in sin must cease to exist in order to have a perfect world. This is the world that God desired for Adam and Eve from the beginning. But since the Fall of Man, we have lived in the shadow of sin. Because we have all sinned, we all deserve to die. In Romans 5:12-14 we read, “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus sin spread to all men, because all sinned.*” That is our judgment! Since Adam, we have all been condemned to death! And the restoration of all things won’t occur until sin is completely wiped out.

Salvation starts by just that; accepting our sinfulness and realizing that we deserve death for our sins. We need to recognize that sin must be wiped out of our lives to be close to God. This is repentance—when you realize that sin must cease in your life, and therefore, your lifestyle must change. We need to realize that we are nothing without God, and that we can’t do anything without Him.

But some people may ask why death and suffering. Why not go straight to the blessings and skip death? Some blame the punishments of mankind on Adam and Eve—but we could be missing the whole point that God wants to teach us. God intended humans to become His children even before Creation! He wanted us to be part of His Family! He wanted His children to inherit a perfect world to live in everlasting peace and joy! In Romans 8:14 we read, “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these*

*are sons of God.*” That’s why in Genesis 1:26 God said, “*Let us make man in our image and our likeness.*” We were made in His image and likeness as a foreshadow that we will be His children one day!

But to become His children, we need to understand the implications of sin and evil—which is suffering and death. We chose to understand the implications of sin and evil by experiencing suffering and death when Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. **Although suffering and death is hard, it does help us understand divinity.** You see, death will bring all of our life experiences into divine perspective. In our judgement, we will realize that all that we thought was so important (money, houses, beauty, glory, etc.), suddenly is not. All that we thought was not so important (doing good, being kind, loving God and your neighbor, etc.), suddenly is. Also, death makes us experience the final consequence of sin. Therefore, **death is part of a learning and maturing process that will help us have a perspective somewhat similar to God’s—it will help us become children of God.** Doesn’t a seed have to be dead before it flourishes (1 Cor. 15:36)? **We need to grow and mature in divine likeness to be children of God.** You’ve heard the phrase, “like father, like son.” In the same manner, we want to develop the character of God if we are to be called His children.

To fully understand what God doesn’t want you to do, you have to see it and taste it. I’m not proposing that we should want to seek sin and evil but we will sin and die whether we try to be righteous or not. We will experience suffering and death one way or another. How can you know if evil is bad if you don’t experience its consequences—suffering and death? Have you ever wonder why the name of the tree was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? God knows both, good and evil, and He desires that we also know both so that we reject evil and uphold what is good. That’s part of what divine likeness is! In other words, **the consequences of sin, which are suffering and death, will help us gain a divine perspective of good and evil.**

But there’s no need for us to be fearful of death for Christ has conquered death! He has overcome death and offers us eternal life! In 2 Timothy 1:8-10 we read, “*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearance of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*” For death is a temporary sting for those in Christ! In 1 Corinthians 15:55-56 we read, “*‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” That is the good news!

God desires all humans to be saved and live an eternal and abundant life. In 1 Timothy 2:3-4 we read, “*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.*”

But just how exactly are we saved?

## Justification and Sanctification

The Bible clearly explains through the New Testament that we are saved by being justified. Justified means declared righteous or declared innocent. And we are justified by the **grace** of God through **faith** in Jesus. In Ephesians 2:8-10 we read, *“For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God: not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

Grace is an unmerited gift from God—it’s not by our works (anything we did), but simply by the mercy of God. By this grace, through faith in Jesus, righteousness is imputed to us. Meaning, even though we are inherently sinners, by God’s grace and thru faith in Christ, our sins are paid by Christ’s sacrifice, and therefore, we become righteous because we have been cleansed from sin. While this is a simple concept, it’s hard for us to understand it because we are used to earning everything in life (not receiving things for free). We are also used to paying for our mistakes. What we are not used to is grace. But when we understand that God desired salvation for mankind from the beginning, then grace is not too hard to understand.

*“But for us also, to whom it [righteousness] shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification”* (Rom. 4:24-25). Again, this imputed righteousness is by faith; nothing that we did because the righteousness that comes from you (as good as it might be) will never be sufficient to earn you salvation. That’s why Jesus said no one is good except the Father (Mat. 19:17). Many scriptures in the Bible confirm our inherent sinfulness (Rom. 3:10; Isa. 64:6; Jer. 17:9). **So our deeds/works will never be sufficient for us to be saved, but the grace of God will be sufficient for us** (2 Cor. 12:9)—God’s imputed righteousness will suffice where your own righteousness falls short.

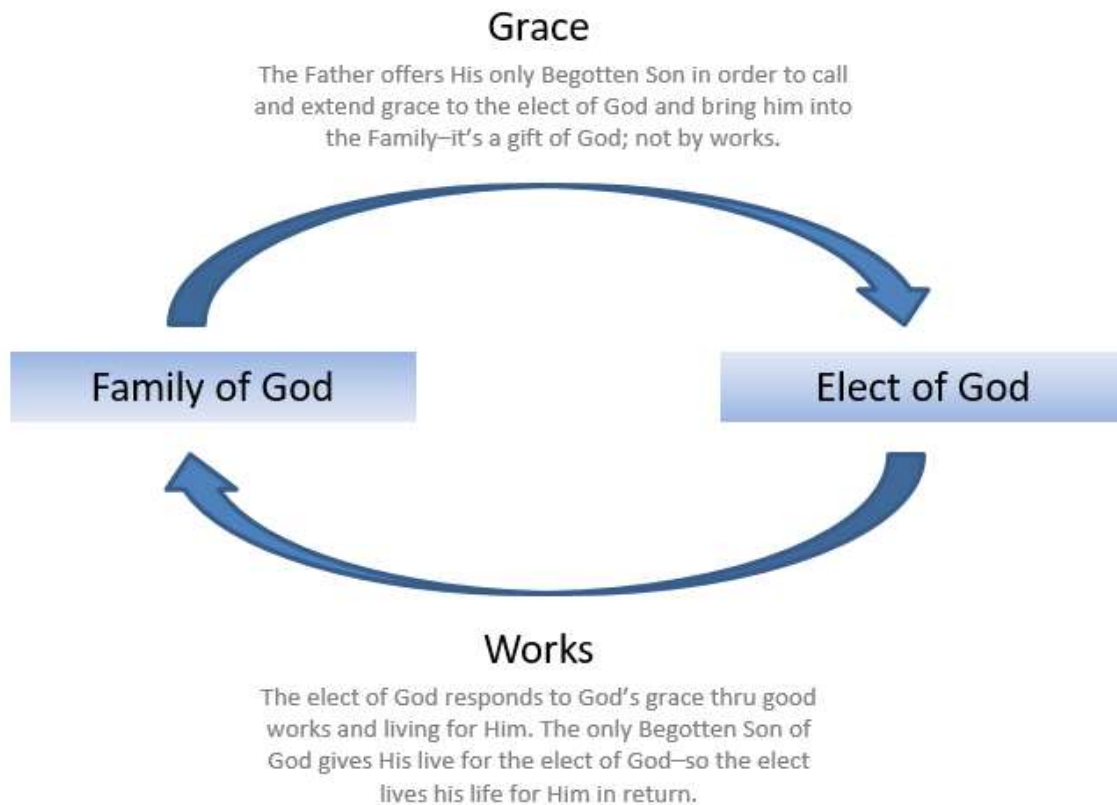
And what exactly is faith in Jesus? One of the dictionary definition for faith is having confidence or trust in a person. So having faith in Jesus is not just a matter of **believing** that He was, in fact, the Son of God in the flesh (and therefore, He was God too), and that He died and rose again. But faith also means **trusting** in Him that, because He overcame death, He now has authority and power over death, and He will to intercede for us in the presence of the Father as our High Priest and Savior; therefore, we trust that He will give us that eternal life that we all desire (John 5:19-29). Imagine a famous swimmer that has a lot of fans that have gathered to see him swim across a deep and wild river. The famous swimmer asks the fans, “Who here believes I can cross this river?” All of the fans cheer and reply that they believe he can do it. But then the swimmer asks, “Who among you is willing to get on my back holding on to me as I swim to the other side?” Then, there’s silence, and only one raises his hand that is willing to do it. That one fan that was willing to hold on to the famous swimmer didn’t just believe he could do it, but he also trusted with his life that he could do it. That’s the kind of faith (believe/trust) that we should have in the Messiah.

Now, to be saved by having faith in Jesus may sound simple enough for Christians today but it wasn’t that simple to grasp in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. In the times of Jesus, Jewish people believed that we were saved by a set of rules written down in the Law—so to say that now we have to believe on this one person and

we shall be saved was hard for them to grasp. So then we realize that faith has an element believing on something with no proof (Heb. 11:1). But we should get rid of our doubts and trust in Yeshua that He will raise us from the dead just like He was raised from the dead.

So we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus, but God is expecting us to produce fruit—producing fruit really meaning that we should have good works and developing a character similar to God. **While works are not needed to receive grace (it is a gift of God, not by anything that we do), works are expected of you to make your salvation sure.** In 2 Peter 1:10a we read, *“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.”* God’s reaching out to you was by grace, but we secure our election by our works—we respond to grace by our works. From God comes all sorts of good works, and if we want to be His children, we need to produce all kinds of good works too. With the help of the Holy Spirit in us, we will sin less and all sorts of good will come out of us. In Ephesians 2:8-10 we read that we are saved by grace and not by works but then Paul says that, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works;”* meaning, after we are baptized in Jesus, we are a new creation in Him set to do good works.

## Salvation Process



When we get baptized, symbolically, we put to death our old self. When you go under the water, that is a symbolism for leaving behind your old self under the water—but when you rise from the water, it

symbolizes the rise of the new you! This ritual will cleanse you from your sins through the sacrifice of Christ. So when you come out of the water, you are cleansed of your sins! Because the Holy Spirit is divine and holy, we must be cleansed first before the Holy Spirit come to dwell in us—just like the examples of the Old Testament where a ritually unclean person couldn't touch anything holy. So after you are cleansed and after the laying of hands, the Holy Spirit enters in you.

After baptism, we are, indeed, a new creation but also need to grow and mature, spiritually speaking (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Eph. 4:11-15; 1 Cor. 13:9-12). After baptism, you are living a new life which involves living by the Spirit instead of living by the flesh. **You are living the Way of God** (Act 18:25-26)! This means that now you will want to live life in a way that is pleasing to God. Now you have to make your salvation sure—and you do that with good works and developing God's character in you! You do that by producing spiritual fruits. This is the sanctification process. In the sanctification process, you make you salvation sure by how do you respond to God's grace. **God give grace, and we should respond with good works and living the Way of life of God.** The sanctification process is then where we try to become holier and holier like God in our thinking and our actions—and that requires work! In my experience, getting rid of sin doesn't happen by wishing it to go away or just praying about it. Don't get me wrong, you do need to pray about it because you need God's help, but I've also noted that you have to do your part. You need determination and self-control. Meaning, you have to do something on your side to stop sinning and to start living the Way.

So then we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus but **our faith is completed/perfected by our works**. In James 2:21-24 we read, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? See you how faith wrought [cooperates] with his works, and by works faith was made perfect [complete]? And the scripture was fulfilled which said, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. **You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.**”* If you think about it, your actions are a result of your faith (or what you believe in). You wouldn't do or say something that you don't believe in. Or put it in another way, you can say you believe in something but what if you actions say otherwise? Your actions speak louder than your words! From that point of view, your works will complete your faith. Jesus told us in Mat. 5:14-16 that we ought to be a light in this dark world; how can you be a light to this world with no works? How can you let your light shine with no action?

So God is expecting good works to come from us after baptism, even though we are not counting to be saved by those works or to be sufficient for salvation (God's grace is our sufficiency); but our works will make our election sure and also determine our reward in the Kingdom of God. In Rev. 2:23b we read, *“And I will give to each one of you **according to your works.**”* Also, in Rev. 22:12 we read, *“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one **according to his work.**”* A great biblical example of rewards based on works is found in the Parable of the Talents (Mat. 25:14-30).

After baptism, we are not perfect. Even with the Holy Spirit in us, we will sin because of our sinful nature. At the moment we sin, we are not righteous anymore; therefore, we need grace again to be justified—or declared righteous again. But Paul rightly said in Romans 5:20b, *“**where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.**”* In the Old Covenant, as a foreshadow of a better covenant, God allowed for

daily sacrifice for forgiveness of sins (Num. 28:1-8). So it's no coincidence that Jesus taught us in the model prayer to ask for forgiveness for your sins on a daily basis (Mat. 6:9-13). We will sin after baptism and we need to confess those sins to God. If we confess our sins to God and ask for forgiveness, He will extend more grace to us. In 1 John 1:9 we read, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" This daily forgiveness of sins, allows us to be in a **continual state of justification and sanctification** in the eyes of God—allowing us a close relationship with Him.

So now we see that the salvation process is not a linear one where God extends grace and we don't do anything. Now we see that the salvation process is a circular one where God extends grace and we respond to God's grace by our good works—and when we sin and ask for forgiveness, God extends more grace and we produce even more fruit (like a branch of a vine that has been pruned so it produces more fruit)! In James 4:5-6 we read, "*Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?' But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resist the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'*" Here we see that God continues to give grace to us as the Spirit and our High Priest, Jesus Christ, intercedes for us before the Father. We also see that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. It takes a humble person to recognize their sinful nature and understand that apart from God we cannot do anything. So God extends grace to the humble as we ask for forgiveness on a daily basis. The self-righteous and proud, on the other hand, think they have no need for forgiveness. God resists that mentality.

So if good works can **assure** your salvation, then the opposite must be true. Bad fruits/works or lack of good fruits/works can **annul** your salvation! In the Parable of the Vine in John 15:1-6, Christ is the vine and the members of the Church are the branches. These "branches" are in Christ (in the vine) already because they are baptized members but if they don't produce fruits, they will be cut-off. Christ exhorts us to "remain" in Him by: 1) keeping the commandments (v. 10) and 2) producing much Spiritual Fruits (v. 8; Mat. 13:23).

The Parable of the Vine is actually perfect to describe what can happen to a baptized member. After you receive the Holy Spirit, you need to produce Spiritual Fruits; if you don't, then you will "grieve" the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). In this parable the baptized members are the branches. If you grieve the Holy Spirit enough, the branch eventually will dry-up. If the branch dries-up too much, eventually it will die and will need to be cut-off. In other words, if you don't produce Spiritual Fruits, if you don't keep the commandments, if you don't live the Way of life of God, the Holy Spirit may leave you and you could lose your access to eternal life.

In 1 Corinthians 9:27 Paul writes, "*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*" In the same manner, we should discipline our body and subject it to the Way of life of God so we don't become disqualified.

That might sound harsh but God give us some simple examples in nature to understand His thinking. If you were a gardener, and you have a certain tree that doesn't produce fruit, and you have worked with this tree trying to help it grow fruit but it doesn't, would you not cut it down and plant another in its



place that does produce fruit? This is an actual parable of Jesus Christ found in Luke 13:6-9, but I just wanted to point out that any gardener would do the same. Nobody has any use for a tree or a plant that dries up and doesn't produce fruit. In this parable the gardener has been waiting three years for this tree to produce fruit, and he decides to wait one more year but if the tree doesn't produce fruit after the year, then he will be cut it down. God has great patience but His patience has limits too. The point is, as Jesus said, *"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"* (Mat. 7:19).

I don't mean to scare anybody but I do want to make a point that God is expecting us to be different after baptism. God is expecting us to keep His Commandments, which reflect His character. The Law is a moral guide for us to be more like God every day. The Law helps us become more and more like God every day. I mean, how hard can it be to stop committing adultery? How hard can it be to stop murdering? How hard can it be to stop stealing? It is hard for human nature but not that hard—we just need to try our best and the Holy Spirit will take care of the rest. That's why the Holy Spirit is called the Helper! If we need to overcome any sin, we can ask God to help us overcome it—in Romans 8:31 we read, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* And, to be clear, even if we ask God to take our weaknesses away, He might still leave us with some in us (for the flesh is weak) but as long as we are trying, God can see that, and then His grace will be sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Just like the Lord told Paul after he asked Him three times to take away a weakness that he had, and He said, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness"* (v. 9). Wow! That's powerful and profound—but it also gives us peace that God will take care of us as long as He sees that our heart is pure and that we are trying with all of our might to please Him.

Again, I'm not trying to scare anybody but, just like today, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century there were people that had come to the faith that kept sinning and didn't produce any spiritual fruit because they use the grace of God as a license to sin—and that's a costly mistake! Paul warned against it in Gal. 5:13, *"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."* In Rom. 6:1-2, Paul also asks, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"*

Going back to the Vine Parable, after baptism, God wants us to *"bear much fruit"*—and we do that by keeping His Commandments (which will teach us what is sin), by doing good deeds, and by living the Way of life that pleases God and it's a light to this dark world!

A good question might rise then, how do you know if you are producing spiritual fruits? The Bible details them in Gal. 5:22. **The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.** If you see these fruits that come from God in your life, then you are growing spiritually. Also, are you doing pure religion? Sometimes people come up with our own ideas of religion but the Bible is clear on what pure religion is, *"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"* (James 1:27).

So how do we avoid becoming disqualified? Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9:24-26, *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it."*

*And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.”* Run in such a way that you may obtain the unperishable crown! **Live for God!** Everything you do, do it for God and do it with all of your might (Eccl. 9:10). And run with confidence, knowing that if you put all your efforts into living the Way of life of God, witnessing and living for Him, even if you sin, His grace will be sufficient for you!

This is how we grow spiritually; we work towards becoming more like Him and living for Him every day. And just like it takes time for a tree to grow and produce fruits, it also takes time for us to produce these fruits. So, you see, **faith and works go hand in hand in the salvation process—faith in the justification process and works in the sanctification process.** Apostle James, inspired by God, could have not said it better, *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (James 2:26).

A little side note, some people use the criminal on the cross to argue that works are not needed for salvation (Luke 23:39-43). But I would argue that the criminal did do some work—although, very little. The criminal, firstly, believed in Jesus and called Him “Lord.” The criminal had faith in Jesus that He could save him so he asked Jesus to remember him when He goes into His kingdom. The criminal also repented, knowing that he and the other malefactor deserved this punishment. And lastly, the criminal rebuked the other malefactor because he didn’t *“fear God”*—you rebuke in a godly manner out of conviction for what you believe; in this case, he believed in Jesus. Repenting and rebuking are types of work. These are actions that we take based on our faith—again, works complete faith. Although, the criminal on the cross did little work, God’s grace is so great that it was sufficient for him.

### **Glorification**

Glorification is the final step in the salvation process—it’s when you are resurrected to become a completed and perfected child of God. When we are resurrected, we will be incorruptible beings—no more weaknesses (1 Cor. 15:50-58). You become part of the Family of God! This is when your salvation has been completed! You have reached full spiritual maturity and now you can live an eternal life as a member of the Family of God! If the Holy Spirit in us acts as a down payment for our salvation (Eph. 1:13-14), then this is when you receive the rest of the payment—or reward!

The salvation process is then like a seed (you) that God selects and plants. But for the tree to grow, it needs good soil (works), sunlight (the Holy Spirit) and water (grace). And with time, the tree grows and produces much fruit to the pleasure of the Gardener.

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January 18, 2020