

## HOW DOES GOD SAVE SINNERS?

**God saves sinners.** These three words summarises perfectly the whole of the Christian gospel. Of course there are other aspects of the gospel such as God's desire to help the poor and hungry and his efforts to motivate charitable works to meet this need, but the supreme essence of Christianity is the God saves sinners.

God hates sin and it grieves his holiness. There is no excuse for sin because it originated not in a time of desperate need and trouble, but in the perfection and plenty of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). Sin is not some human social defect but a rebellion against the rule and authority of God. It is lawlessness. There is no excuse for it but still God loves sinners and longs to save them from the consequence of their sin, which is hell and an eternity without God.

Sin is not an expression of some activity of man's body, but a determination in his mind to go his own way. This is why Jesus said, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount that a man has committed adultery in his mind when he lusts after a woman. Where the mind goes the body will eventually inevitably follow.

Sin dangles before men and women many attractive pleasures but these are only temporary. Eventually the price will have to be paid and the wages of sin is death. From this awful state men and women need to be saved, but how can it be done? Man is totally incapable of saving himself so if God does not save him he has no hope.

### *How does God save?*

**First of all God decides to save.** Among Christians, the subject of election and predestination is undoubtedly one of the most controversial. Some believers love and cherish it as most thrilling and humbling; others will not tolerate it at any price, regarding it as totally abhorrent.

Many object that election is unfair and it removes human responsibility. In Romans 9 Paul states clearly the doctrine and then in verse 14 asks: 'What then shall we say?' — Or in other words, what is our reaction to this? He then poses and answers two questions.

1. 'Is God unjust?' (v. 14) — It is not fair, say some. His answer to this is twofold.

- This is what Scripture teaches, illustrated by Exodus 33:19.
- Far from being unfair, election is an act of divine mercy. God does not punish anyone unjustly.

He did not make Pharaoh a sinner any more than he made us sinners. We are all sinners by nature, and therefore all deserve God's wrath. But God in his mercy saves some, and in his justice condemns others. So he who is saved cannot claim that he is better than others, and he who is condemned must acknowledge that he receives only what he deserves.

'Then why does God still blame us?' (v. 19) — that is, man cannot be held responsible, for who can resist God's will? Paul answers that such an objection springs from ignorance of the true relationship between God and man (v. 20). God is our Creator, so we dare not demand that he should answer to our reasoning. Who are we to dismiss something so clear simply because it is not acceptable to our little minds? Election is one of the most thrilling and humbling truths in the Bible.

**Secondly God provides a saviour.** But who can do it? In the Bible records the loves of its great heroes are shown with all their strengths but also with all their weaknesses and failures. One of the reasons for this is to show that great men like David and Moses could not keep themselves from sin let alone save others. So who will the saviour be? It has to be someone sinless so that sin and judgement has no claims on him, and it has to be a man because by man came sin so by man must come the remedy to sin. The problem was that no man was sinless so in the person of Jesus, God became man and as the sinless Jesus he himself became the saviour.

**Jesus had to become a man in order to deal legally and justly with our sin.** It was man who had broken God's law and sinned, therefore it had to be man who would pay the penalty for that sin. But there was no man qualified to do this, so God became man in the person of Jesus Christ and did for us what was crucial for our salvation.

Salvation was planned in heaven, but it could not be accomplished in heaven. The punishment of sin must be given to man and the sacrifice that would obtain salvation must be made by man. But all men and women are sinners so there is no one good enough to do this. The only solution was for God to become man' so that by his death' (Hebrews 2:14) he could purchase salvation for his people. God became man so that as the man Jesus he could die for his people and obtain for them an eternal salvation.

**This is why God became man.**

**God saves**

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16).

Here we have a perfect statement of God's glorious remedy for sin. God hates sin, but in his divine love he has prepared a remedy which deals justly with the punishment that sin deserves, and yet at the same time provides pardon for the sinner.

God has said that the penalty for sin is death-spiritual and physical death. Nothing can change that, because it is the judgment of the holy God. As such it is perfect and correct. God will not pretend that a man has not sinned. Justice must be done. The demands of God's law and the penalties for breaking that law must be satisfied.

In love and mercy God declares that he will accept a substitute to die in the sinner's place. But God's law demands the substitute must be free from the guilt of sin, and therefore not deserving of death himself. There was no man who met these requirements. So God became manna holy, perfect, sinless man, whose name was Jesus. Read very carefully the following words from Romans 3:25, 26: 'God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.'

Now turn to Ephesians 2 and read that chapter carefully. Here is God's remedy for your sin. It is all of grace. 'Grace' means that you did nothing to deserve such a remedy, and that you contributed nothing toward it. This should encourage you in seeking God. It is not that you seek God, but that God seeks you. The Lord God Almighty has himself provided a remedy for your sin so that you may know and love him. This remedy is to be found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, in seeking God, it is vital that you know who Jesus is.