



ETERNAL LIFE



God's Free Gift to the World



DR. STEVEN R. COOK



Eternal Life:
God's Free Gift to the World

© 2025 by Steven R. Cook.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior permission in writing from the author, except for brief quotations.

Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotes are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, © Copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, 1995. Used by permission.

TOS Publications
Printed in the United States of America
Arlington, Texas

www.thinkingonscripture.com

Other books by Steven R. Cook:

- [Eternal Life: God's Free Gift to the World](#)
- [Knowing God in Prison](#)
- [Overcoming Evil in Prison](#)
- [Making a Biblical Marriage](#)
- [Grace in the Low Places](#)
- [A Concise Dictionary of Christian Doctrine](#)
- [Sin: A Brief Biblical Analysis](#)
- [Soteriology: A Basic Introduction](#)
- [Suffering: A Biblical Consideration](#)
- [The Christian Life: A Study of Biblical Spirituality](#)
- [The Cross of Christ: Sufficient to Save](#)
- [Basic Theology for Every Christian](#)
- [Tares Among the Wheat: Living Righteously in a Fallen World](#)
- [A Biblical Critique of Five Point Calvinism](#)
- [A Survey of the Book of Revelation](#)
- [The Future Revealed: An Overview of Coming Bible Prophecy](#)
- [Thinking on Scripture - Volume 1](#)
- [Thinking on Scripture - Volume 2](#)
- [Thinking on Scripture - Volume 3](#)

Contents

INTRODUCTION

THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS

GOD IS HOLY

EVERYONE IS A SINNER

GOOD WORKS DO NOT SAVE

CHRIST DIED FOR US

THE IMPORTANCE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

ETERNAL LIFE IS A FREE GIFT

BELIEVE IN JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOR

OUR NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST

THE DANGER OF HELL

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO NEVER HEAR THE GOSPEL?

ALL BABIES GO TO HEAVEN WHEN THEY DIE

WHAT SHOULD WE DO AFTER BEING SAVED?

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This book is written to offer clarity, encouragement, and biblical understanding. It is a simple and systematic presentation of the doctrine of eternal life from a plain reading of Scripture. We will explore what Scripture teaches about the gift of life, how it is received by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and why it cannot be lost. Because eternal life is a gift, it can only be received. It cannot be earned, bought, or bargained for.

My prayer is that this short work will provide theological clarity, spiritual encouragement, and practical assurance. May it strengthen your understanding of the gospel, deepen your gratitude for God's grace, and embolden you to share the good news with others. In a world filled with uncertainty and confusion, we need to recover the clear and simple message that eternal life is, indeed, God's free gift to the world.

Eternal life is not a reward for the righteous but a gift for the guilty. It is not earned by religious observance or performance, nor maintained by human merit. Rather, it is freely given by God at the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again to give us life that never ends (John 3:16; 5:24; 10:28; Rom 6:23). Sadly, many people—even some sincere Christians—are confused about the nature of eternal life. They view salvation as conditional, fragile, and uncertain. They fear that eternal life can be lost through sin or forfeited through failure. Some labor under the weight of legalism, mistaking discipleship for the means of salvation, and treating perseverance in good works as the ground of assurance. This confusion not only obscures the grace of God but also robs the believer of joy, peace, and the confidence that belongs to those who are in Christ.

THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS

The word *gospel* derives from the Greek term *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον), meaning “good news.” The gospel is the solution to a problem. It’s the good news that follows the bad news. The bad news is that all people are sinners by nature and by choice, separated from a holy and righteous God (Isa 59:2; Rom 3:10, 23), and totally helpless to save ourselves (Rom 5:6-10). Apart from divine intervention, we are spiritually dead, enslaved to sin, and destined for eternal condemnation (John 3:18, 36; Eph 2:1-3). This is not merely a matter of moral failure but of judicial guilt before the God whose character cannot tolerate sin. Humanity’s plight is not only desperate but helpless—we can neither save ourselves nor contribute to our salvation.

But into this hopeless condition, the gospel shines forth as a message of grace. It proclaims that Jesus Christ—the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity—entered human history as the God-Man, lived a sinless life, and willingly gave Himself as our Substitute. The Bible states, “while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6), and “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). On the cross, Jesus bore the full penalty of our sin, satisfying the righteous demands of God’s justice (1 Pet 2:24). Scripture states that “Christ died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18a). Jesus is just. We are unjust. He died for us, in our place, in order to bring us to God, because we are helpless to bring ourselves. After Jesus died for our sins, He was buried in a grave, and on the third day, He rose bodily from the grave, demonstrating His victory over sin and death and validating His divine identity (Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 15:3-4). At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness required, and pardons the sinner as His love desires. To understand the cross of Christ is to understand the heart of God toward a fallen world He wants to save. In this one act, God’s righteousness and love are displayed in perfect harmony (Rom 3:24-26).

The cross reveals a God who is holy and cannot overlook sin, yet who is loving and desires to save (John 3:16; 2 Pet 3:9). The gospel is not a call to self-reformation or religious performance, but an invitation to receive, by faith alone, the gift of eternal life that Christ purchased fully and freely (Mark 10:45; John 19:30). It is the message that salvation is of the Lord, entirely by His grace, and available to all who will simply believe in the Savior He has provided. In this way, the gospel is not merely theological truth; it is intensely personal. It is God’s rescue plan for a lost world, centered in Christ, accomplished at the cross, and offered without cost to the one who believes in Jesus as their Savior. It is the one message that brings spiritual life to the spiritually dead and eternal hope to those without hope. It is, in every sense, *good news*.

GOD IS HOLY

The Bible reveals that God is holy. He declares of Himself, “I am holy” (Lev 11:44), the psalmist affirms, “Holy is the LORD our God” (Psa 99:9), and the seraphim proclaim, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:3). In her prayer, Hannah testifies, “There is no one holy like the LORD” (1 Sam 2:2). In these verses, the word “holy” translates the Hebrew word *qadōsh* (קָדוֹשׁ), which conveys the idea of “being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities.”¹ God’s holiness is closely linked with His righteousness, justice, and perfection. Holiness denotes moral purity. Because God is absolutely holy, it is written, “no evil dwells with You” (Psa 5:4), “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Hab 1:13), and “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Evil is any thought, word, or act that is contrary to the character and will of God. According to Unger, moral evil “is the failure of rational and free beings to conform in character and conduct to the will of God.”² God is in no way the author of evil, nor is He responsible for it. Evil originates in the heart (Gen 6:5; Zech 8:17), is part of our nature (Matt 7:11), and results in evil actions (Neh 13:17; Prov 24:8; 1 Pet 3:12).³ According to Scripture, “the LORD is righteous and He loves righteousness” (Psa 11:7). There is a time when “He is coming to judge the earth; and He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness” (Psa 96:13), and He will “judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim 4:1).

When we truly grasp the holiness of God, it changes how we see everything—especially ourselves. Standing before a holy God, we begin to understand the seriousness of sin and the depth of our need for grace. When Isaiah was confronted with God’s holiness, he cried out, “Woe is me, for I am ruined!” (Isa 6:5). God’s holiness reminds us that sin is not merely a mistake or a flaw, but a rebellion against the very nature of the God who created us. Yet, the wonder of the gospel is that this holy God, who cannot overlook sin, also made a way for sinners to be declared righteous without compromising His character. In His love, God provided what His holiness demanded. He didn’t lower His standard—He met it fully in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is why we never start with man when explaining salvation—we begin with the holiness of God, because until we see Him as He is, we won’t understand how much we need what only He can provide.

¹ James Swanson, “קָדוֹשׁ”, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

² Merrill Frederick Unger, “Evil” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 382.

³ To be evil means we conform ourselves to Satan’s world-system (1 John 2:15-16), and that we, by default, are self-centered and not God-centered. To be righteous means we are conformed to God’s character and will, both in a salvific and sanctified way.

EVERYONE IS A SINNER

The Bible reveals that everyone is a sinner. Sin is the failure to conform to God's perfect righteousness. Scripture reveals we are sinners "in Adam" (Rom 5:12-13; 1 Cor 15:21-22), sinners by nature (Psa 51:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 7:14-25; 13:12-14), sinners by choice (Eccl 7:20; Isa 59:2; Jam 1:14-15; 1 John 1:8, 10), born as "sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2), and are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). Scripture states, "there is no one who does not sin" (1 Ki 8:46), and "there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins" (Eccl 7:20). Isaiah wrote, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isa 53:6a). Paul stated that we "are all under sin" (Rom 3:9), that "there is none righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10), for "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23a). James wrote, "we all stumble in many ways" (Jam 3:2a), and John declared, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8, 10). This means everyone stands guilty before God.

Sin isn't just something others commit; it's something each of us carries within. We aren't sinners because we sin—we sin because we are sinners by nature, by inheritance, and by personal choice. This is why good intentions, moral living, or religious rituals can never make us right with a holy God. Sin is more than a list of wrongdoings; it's a condition of the heart that separates us from the One who made us. Like sheep, we wander. Like Adam, we hide. But God doesn't leave us in the dark. He lovingly exposes our sin, not to shame us, but to show us our need for the Savior. Until we see our guilt, we won't seek His grace. And until we understand our lostness, we won't appreciate the beauty of the gospel.

GOOD WORKS DO NOT SAVE

Good works have no saving merit before God. None whatsoever. Isaiah declared, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” (Isa 64:6a). Paul affirmed that “a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Gal 2:16). He also wrote, “By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9). Furthermore, God “saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works” (2 Tim 1:9), and “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness” (Tit 3:5a). Though human good works may carry value in the eyes of others, they possess absolutely no saving merit in the sight of God. None at all!

One of the hardest truths for many to accept is that we cannot earn our way into heaven. We live in a performance-driven world where effort is rewarded and achievement is applauded, but God doesn’t operate on our system when it comes to salvation. He’s not impressed with our best efforts, because even our so-called “righteous deeds” are stained with sin and self (Isa 64:6). The Bible makes it plain: salvation is not a paycheck we earn (Rom 4:4-5), but a gift we receive (Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8-9). If we could work our way into God’s favor, then Christ died for nothing. But the cross tells a different story—it tells us that grace, not works, opens the door to eternal life. That’s good news for all of us, because it means we don’t have to strive, prove, or perform. We simply trust in the One who did all the work for us. After we are saved, God calls us to a life of good works (Eph 2:10; Gal 6:10), but they are never the condition of our salvation (Rom 4:4-5; Eph 2:8-9).⁴

⁴ God calls us to live righteous lives and perform good works. Paul wrote, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10). The Lord instructs us “to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Tit 2:12) and to be “zealous for good deeds” (Tit 2:14). We agree with Paul who wrote, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal 6:10).

CHRIST DIED FOR US

Our eternal salvation is the work of the triune God. God the Father planned our salvation in eternity past, choosing to send His Son for our redemption (John 3:16; Eph 1:3-5). God the Son, Jesus Christ, accomplished our salvation by His substitutionary death on the cross and bodily resurrection, securing forgiveness and eternal life for all who believe (Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3-4). God the Holy Spirit applies salvation to the believer, convicting the world of sin, regenerating those who believe, and sealing them for the day of redemption (John 16:8; Tit 3:5; Eph 1:13-14). Though all three Persons of the Godhead worked to bring about our salvation, the gospel specifically calls our attention to Jesus as the Savior—the One who died for our sins and rose again, so that we might have eternal life through faith in Him (John 3:16; 1 Cor 15:3-4).

The saving work of God the Son was necessary because we are helpless to save ourselves. But God loves us so much that He sent His Son into the world to pay the sin debt we could never pay. God's Word tells us, "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). This was the great mission: to bring salvation to everyone. This act of God was done in love, as it is written, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16), and "He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). The Son agreed with the Father, saying, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38), and "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). When God the Son came into the world and took upon Himself humanity, He executed His mission flawlessly.

The divine mission began in time and space nearly two thousand years ago when God the Son took upon Himself humanity. The writer to the Hebrews cites the words of God the Son as He was about to enter the world, saying, "Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says [to God the Father], 'Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me'" (Heb 10:5). The third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, facilitated the mission by bringing about the union of God and man (the hypostatic union) within the womb of the virgin Mary (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:30-35; Gal 4:4). The angel Gabriel told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). At the moment of conception in the womb of the virgin Mary, undiminished deity was combined forever with perfect humanity. Jesus was born, and God "became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The apostle Paul tells us, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col 2:9).

God's Word informs us that Jesus was a Jew, born a son of Abraham, in the line of David (Matt 1:1), the promised Messiah (Matt 1:17). Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:40, 52) and lived a perfectly righteous life before God and man. The record of Scripture is that Jesus "knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21), was "without sin" (Heb 4:15), "committed no sin" (1 Pet 2:22),

and “in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). In His humanity, Jesus walked in perfect conformity to God the Father’s holy character and divine revelation. This is important, for Jesus’ sinless life qualified Him to go to the cross and pay the ransom price for our sins (Mark 10:45).

When the divinely appointed time came for Jesus to go to the cross (John 12:23; 13:1), He went willingly (Isa 53:10; John 10:18). Just hours before His crucifixion, Jesus said to the Father, “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4). Then He went to the cross and “offered Himself without blemish to God” (Heb 9:14), giving “His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). While on the cross, “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3), and He died in our place, “the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). Jesus paid our sin debt by means of His “precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19). The blood of Christ is the coin of the heavenly realm that paid our sin-debt in full.

Jesus’ death on the cross was a one-time event, as He “offered one sacrifice for sins for all time” (Heb 10:12). After Jesus paid for all our sins, “He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit” (John 19:30). Jesus’ death on the cross satisfied every righteous demand of God the Father concerning the payment for our sins (Rom 3:25), for “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Jesus paid the price for all our sins. There’s nothing more to pay. After Jesus died, He was placed in a grave and was resurrected to life on the third day (Acts 2:23-24; 4:10; 10:40; 1 Cor 15:3-4), never to die again (Rom 6:9). Because Christ died for everyone (John 3:16; Heb 2:9; 1 John 2:2), everyone is savable. The Bible tells us that God has brought “salvation to all men” (Tit 2:11), that He “desires all men to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4), and is “not wishing for any to perish” (2 Pet 3:9).

THE IMPORTANCE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus is a central element of the Christian faith. After His substitutionary death on the cross for our sins, Jesus was buried and rose again on the third day, just as the Scriptures foretold (1 Cor 15:3-4). His resurrection was not a spiritual idea or a myth—it was a bodily resurrection, witnessed by many. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then to the other women, to Peter, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the eleven apostles, and eventually to over 500 believers at one time (Luke 24:34; John 20:16-18; 1 Cor 15:5-6). Even Thomas, the skeptic, saw and touched the risen Lord (John 20:27-28). These eyewitnesses ate with Him, walked with Him, and spoke with Him.

Jesus' bodily resurrection validates everything He said and did. It proves He is the Son of God (Rom 1:4), confirms the sufficiency of His atoning work (Rom 4:25), and secures our hope of eternal life (1 Pet 1:3). Without the resurrection, there is no gospel, no salvation, and no hope, as Paul wrote, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). But since He *has* been raised, we proclaim a living Savior who conquered sin and death and offers eternal life to all who believe in Him (John 11:25-26).

ETERNAL LIFE IS A FREE GIFT

Eternal life is a free gift from God. It is the most precious gift ever offered. And though the gift was very expensive to God, it is absolutely free to us. The precious gift of our salvation was paid in full by the Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins, who hung between heaven and earth and paid our sin-debt. According to God's Word, "**the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**" (Rom 6:23). The words "free gift" translate the Greek noun *charisma* (χάρισμα) which refers to "that which is freely and graciously given, favor bestowed, gift."⁵ Paul, when writing to the Christians at Ephesus, said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9; cf., Rom 4:4-5; Tit 3:5). To say we are saved by grace means our salvation is unearned and undeserved in any way. God's gift of salvation is entirely apart from any good works we may produce—whether before, during, or after salvation. Since good works do not save, bad works cannot unsave, though they may bring divine discipline (1 Cor 11:30-32; Heb 12:6). A gift focuses on the graciousness of the giver, whereas a reward focuses on the work of the recipient. Salvation is NOT a reward for work we've accomplished; rather, it is a free gift from God and based totally on the finished work of Christ. We pay nothing. Jesus paid it all.

The realization that salvation is offered freely, based solely on the perfect work of Jesus on the cross, offers profound relief to the person who has been laboring under the yoke of a works-based system. Those who operate under a works-based system of salvation will never reach a place of certainty in their relationship with God, for they will never know whether they have done enough to gain entrance into heaven. But the truth that salvation is a grace-gift from God, received by faith alone in Christ alone, liberates those who accept it. When properly grasped, God's gospel of grace alleviates the pressure to perform and the fear of falling short and brings a deep sense of peace and joy, knowing our salvation is secure, not because of our own efforts, but because of Christ's finished work. Peace comes when we look to Christ and the promises of Scripture and not to ourselves (John 10:28; 1 John 5:11-13). This gospel of grace transforms our relationship with God from one of fear and striving to one of gratitude and love, as the focus moves from what we must do to what Christ has already done on our behalf. This grace-based approach encourages us to live out our faith from a place of thankfulness rather than obligation, resulting in a more authentic and joyful Christian life.

⁵ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1081.

BELIEVE IN JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOR

Once we hear the good news concerning Jesus Christ—the eternal Son of God who took upon Himself true humanity (John 1:1, 14; Phil 2:6-8)—and what He accomplished for us at the cross through His substitutionary death, burial, and bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-4), we are called to respond by placing our faith in Him alone. Jesus is the exclusive object of saving faith. As the Scripture plainly states, “whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The prepositional phrase *in Him* signifies that Christ Himself is the direct object, or target, of our trust. Faith is not a meritorious act, nor is it faith in a system, ritual, or human effort—it is faith *in Him*, the risen and glorified Savior, who accomplished everything necessary for our salvation.⁶

When the Philippian jailer cried out, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30), Paul and Silas gave him the clearest and most comforting answer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). That same invitation is extended to us. Salvation doesn’t come through rituals, resolutions, or religious effort. It comes through faith in Christ alone. When we place our trust in Jesus—who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Cor 15:3-4)—we receive the free gift of eternal life (Rom 4:5; 6:23; Eph 2:8-9).

We’re not saved by going to church, walking an aisle, raising a hand, or cleaning up our lives. We’re saved by trusting the One who did all the work—Jesus Christ. He went to the cross, took our place, bore our sin, and rose again on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4). When we believe in Him, we receive eternal life—period (Rom 4:5; 6:23; Eph 2:8-9). Faith isn’t a work. It’s a non-meritorious system of perception. It means we rely on Christ to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves—provide eternal salvation and deliver us from the lake of fire. Faith doesn’t save. Christ saves. Faith is the empty hand that receives the gift—nothing more. We bring nothing to the table. No bargaining. No promises. No payments. Just positive volition. Christ is the issue. Christ is the solution. Christ is the Savior. Believe in Jesus and then relax, knowing that He will save you and keep you saved forever (John 3:16; 6:37-40; 10:28-29).

⁶ Repentance is necessary for salvation when understood as a change of mind, not a turning from sin or emotional sorrow. Biblically, repentance (μετάνοια, *metanoia*) refers to a shift in thinking—from unbelief to belief in Jesus Christ. It is not a moral work or reformation, but a reorientation of one’s perspective on who Christ is and what He has done. The Gospel of John, with its evangelistic purpose (John 20:31), presents belief in Jesus Christ alone as the condition for eternal life. Notably, the term “repentance” is absent in John’s Gospel, highlighting that faith in Christ is the sole requirement for salvation. Repentance and faith are not separate steps, but two sides of the same coin—changing one’s mind about Christ to trust Him alone for eternal life.

OUR NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Every person we meet is either saved or lost. There's no middle ground. People may wear many labels—educated or uneducated, rich or poor, religious or indifferent—but spiritually speaking, every soul falls into one of two categories: saved or lost. That's how God sees the world. The language of the Bible is that we are either **in Adam** or **in Christ** (1 Cor 15:22). To be in Adam means we are part of the old creation, born physically alive but separated from God spiritually. Adam's sin in the garden plunged the human race into ruin, and we inherited that broken condition. Paul said, "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12). That's our old identity, tied to Satan's world-system.

Satan's domain is real, and it's no fairytale. We live in a tyrannical world-system governed by Satan, who is "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Other Scriptures call him "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4) and "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2), revealing that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). As descendants of Adam, we are born under "the dominion of Satan" (Act 26:18), into his "domain of darkness" (Col 1:13a). Those who have not come to Christ are not only lost, they are spiritually enslaved—even if they don't realize it.

But the good news is this: God has made a way of escape. Through the death and resurrection of His Son, He offers forgiveness, freedom, and a future. Scripture reveals that God "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13-14). What a transaction! From slavery to sonship, from guilt to grace, from darkness to light.

The moment we believe in Christ, God places us into a new spiritual position—union with Him—and from that point on, He sees us in that new identity. A real and permanent transfer takes place the instant we trust Jesus as our Savior. We are no longer in Adam, identified with sin and death, but in Christ, identified with His righteousness and life. Being in Christ means we now share in all that He accomplished at the cross, and God sees us through the lens of His finished work. Our standing before God is forever changed. The Bible says we "have been crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20a). The phrase "crucified with" comes from the Greek word *sustauroō* (συσταυρόω), which means to be crucified together with another. It's used literally of the criminals who were nailed to crosses beside Jesus: "the robbers who had been crucified with Him" (Matt 27:44; cf. Mark 15:32; John 19:32). But Paul uses it spiritually to describe our identification with Christ in His death. This is true for all of us who place our faith in the Savior. To be crucified with Christ means that we were united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. God sees us at the cross with His Son—our old self judged and finished. As Paul said, "our old self was crucified with Him" (Rom 6:6), and "we have died with Christ" (Rom 6:8). But death wasn't the end of the story. We were "buried with Him" (Rom 6:4), "raised up with Christ" (Col 3:1; cf. Eph 2:6a), and even now, God sees us seated "with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6b). Our union with Christ defines who we are and secures our eternal future.

Scripture clearly reveals that we have been forgiven of all our sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), granted “eternal life” (John 10:28; Rom 6:23), given the “gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17; Phil 3:9), and have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Moreover, we are “all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26; cf. John 1:12), are “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3), and fully “reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). In addition, we are spiritually connected to “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16), blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3), and have “citizenship in heaven” (Phil 3:20). As members of God’s family, we are each given a spiritual gift (1 Pet 4:10) and called to live in service to Him, “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph 4:1). These are just a few of the identification truths and blessings revealed in Scripture.

THE DANGER OF HELL

Failure to accept God's gracious offer of eternal life means the unbeliever will spend eternity in the lake of fire. The term, *lake of fire*, itself appears in Revelation, where it is linked to the final judgment at the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11-15). The lake of fire is the final place of judgment for Satan, his demons, and all unbelievers. It is described as a place of eternal torment, separation from God, and unquenchable fire (Rev 20:10, 14-15). We are told, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:15). This judgment is irreversible and eternal, marking the complete and final separation from God.

Eternal suffering in the lake of fire is described as a state of eternal conscious torment (Matt 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43-48; Rev 14:10-11). Jesus spoke repeatedly of hell (Gehenna) as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 13:42, 50), emphasizing its severity. The fire is "unquenchable," and the worm "does not die" (Mark 9:48), indicating perpetual suffering. This judgment is not arbitrary but is the result of rejecting God's free gift of eternal life through faith in Christ. Because Jesus died for everyone, it means everyone is savable. If a person goes to the lake of fire, it is based solely on their unbelief. Scripture states, "Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God" (John 3:18 CSB), and "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not believe in the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36 CSB). Jesus explained this when talking about eternal life to unbelieving Jewish religious leaders, saying, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). Their negative volition is what kept them from receiving eternal life.

The way to avoid the lake of fire is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is by grace alone (Eph 2:8-9), through faith alone (Rom 3:28), in Christ alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Jesus bore the full penalty for sin on the cross (Mark 10:45; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 3:18; 2:24), so that anyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sin and eternal life and will never come into condemnation. The Scripture is clear, that "everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43), and "whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16), and that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ" Jesus (Rom 8:1). Believe in Christ. You'll be eternally grateful.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO NEVER HEAR THE GOSPEL?

Someone might ask, “But what about those who have never heard the gospel message? Are they condemned to the lake of fire?” The Bible reveals that God has never left Himself without a witness. Creation is His canvas, and the universe His gallery—proclaiming His eternal power and divine nature day after day. Scripture states, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge” (Psa 19:1-2). This means that every sunrise, every star, every breath of life is a sermon without words, testifying that there is a Creator. Another passage states, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). To say they are “without excuse” means they have no rational basis for denying the existence of God and are held accountable to Him for their decision. This means that general revelation is sufficient to condemn those who reject God, but it is not sufficient to save; salvation requires special revelation about Jesus and His work on the cross.

Now, if a person comes to the awareness of God’s existence and goes negative and does not want to know Him, God will not force that person to come to Him. He will allow them to go their own way, to “love the darkness rather than the Light” (John 3:19), to “suppress the truth” about Him (Rom 1:18), and willfully “exchange the truth of God for a lie” (Rom 1:25). This willful choice has been the path of the majority of people throughout history. Of those who are negative and set their wills against God, three times it is written that He “gave them over” to “the lusts of their hearts” (Rom 1:24), and “to degrading passions” (Rom 1:26), and “to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper” (Rom 1:28). When someone goes negative at God consciousness—when they suppress the truth in unrighteousness—they essentially tell God, “I don’t want You,” and He is under no obligation to grant further light (Rom 1:18, 24-28). While God often gives grace upon grace, He doesn’t owe additional revelation to those who reject the first light He gave. Furthermore, “God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness” (2 Th 2:11-12). God will hold them accountable for their choice, and these will experience degrees of suffering in hell depending on how morally depraved they lived in this world.

In contrast, positive volition is the key to accepting God’s free gift. Isaiah said, “Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near” (Isa 55:6). Paul spoke of unbelievers, saying that “they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). This seeking does not earn salvation, but it reveals a heart that is open to a relationship with God. It reveals positive volition. When a person responds to divine revelation with humility and faith, God graciously supplies the gospel message and the opportunity to believe in Christ for eternal life.

ALL BABIES GO TO HEAVEN WHEN THEY DIE

Another issue that is raised pertains to babies who die. Where do they spend eternity? The Bible teaches that ALL babies and little children go to heaven when they die. This is true because they have not reached the *age of accountability*, the point at which they can be held responsible for their choices. The *age of accountability* refers to the stage in life when an individual gains the capacity to recognize the existence of God, understand moral accountability, and respond to the Gospel. Since children mature at different rates, this age may vary depending on factors such as mental development, life circumstances, and geographical context. This doctrine reflects the understanding that God, in His perfect grace and justice, holds people accountable only for decisions they are mentally and morally capable of making. Because babies and the mentally impaired are unable to understand sin or their need for a Savior, they are graciously covered by God's provision until they reach the stage where personal accountability becomes possible. Romans 1:19-20 affirms that God makes His existence evident to people at a level they can comprehend, further reinforcing the idea that His justice accommodates varying capacities.

The teaching of *the age of accountability* is a theological extrapolation that is born out of certain passages of Scripture. For example, Moses wrote of "little ones... have no knowledge of good or evil" (Deut 1:39). And God spoke of Isaiah's son, Shear-jashub (Isa 7:3), that "before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you [Ahaz] dread will be forsaken" (Isa 7:16). Another revealing passage is found in 2 Chronicles where we're told, "Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem, and he did evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Ch 36:9). Here we see an eight-year-old whose actions were called "evil in the sight of the LORD." It reveals that an eight-year-old with normal cognitive function could be held morally responsible for his actions before the Lord.

Moral accountability before God assumes normal sensory and cognitive function, such that a person who has the sensory and intellectual capacity to know that God exists through creation (Psa 19:1-2; Rom 1:18), can then make a decision to pursue Him, or to "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18). Furthermore, those who suffer from an intellectual or developmental disability (i.e., Down syndrome, severe autism, etc.) are granted a special dispensation concerning their moral accountability before God, and they are granted free access to heaven. The command to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation presupposes intelligence and the ability to exercise one's volition. Children and those who are mentally disabled lack the intellectual and volitional capacity to make a decision for or against Christ; therefore, they are not made accountable for sin. God brings them to heaven when they die.

An often-cited biblical passage on this matter is found in the life of King David who lost a newborn son as a result of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. David was guilty of horrible sin, but he had a sensitive heart and was very concerned for his child. After the death of David's son, he said, "While the child was still

alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.’ But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Sam 12:22-23). While the child was alive, David prayed to God to be gracious “that the child may live.” However, after the child died, David expressed optimism by saying “I will go to him, but he will not return to me.” David was thinking of heaven, where he knew his infant son had gone.

That heaven welcomes little children is clearly stated in Jesus’s words when He told His disciples, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14; cf. Matt 18:3). Jesus’ statement provides assurance that heaven is the rightful home for children. In light of these biblical teachings, it is reasonable to conclude that all babies, young children, and those with severe cognitive impairments who die are graciously welcomed into heaven by God. Since they have not reached the age of accountability, they are not held responsible for moral decisions they are incapable of making. This understanding is rooted in Scripture (Deut 1:39; 2 Sam 12:22-23; Isa 7:16; Mark 10:14), affirming that those who lack the capacity to discern good from evil are covered by God’s grace and are automatically brought to heaven.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO AFTER BEING SAVED?

After regeneration, some believers respond to God's grace with positive volition, desiring to grow in their new identity. They hunger for God's Word (1 Pet 2:2), walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38), and desire to be trained in righteous living (2 Tim 3:16-17). They engage in good works toward all people (Gal 6:10; Eph 2:10), build others up (1 Th 5:11), serve in humility (Phil 2:3-4), exercise their spiritual gift (1 Pet 4:10), and seek to glorify God in all they do (1 Cor 10:31). Others, though just as eternally secure (John 10:28), may live carnally (1 Cor 3:1-3), remaining in spiritual infancy or drifting into rebellion, like the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24). These wayward children of God may tarnish their witness (2 Sam 12:14; Rom 2:24), forfeit eternal rewards (1 Cor 3:12-15; 2 John 1:8), and fall under divine discipline (1 Cor 11:30-32; Heb 12:6), which may culminate in physical death (1 Cor 5:5; 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

God wants your best, but this requires your willing submission to Him. The Christian life does not happen by accident. You must choose to answer the call to walk with Him, to begin a lifelong journey of faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), and to "press on to maturity" (Heb 6:1). Because we live in a fallen world (Gen 3:17; Rom 8:20-22), there will be challenges and trials along the way (John 16:33; Jam 1:2-4), but God is always with you (Heb 13:5), to guide and strengthen you (Psa 32:8; Isa 41:10), until He calls you home to heaven (Phil 3:20-21; 1 Th 4:16-17). As part of our journey, God calls us to study His Word (1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18), renew our minds (Rom 12:1-2), take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5), and to set our minds on things above (Col 3:1-2). He instructs us to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18) and not governed the flesh (Rom 6:13; Gal 5:17), to do good works (Gal 6:10; Eph 2:10), to make the most of our time (Eph 5:15-16), and to live sacrificially for the benefit of others (Phil 2:3-4). Just as God does not force anyone to be saved, neither does He force His children to grow spiritually. Yet He graciously provides the means for growth (2 Pet 1:3), directs our steps (Prov 3:5-6), and blesses our obedience (John 13:17). The Christian who chooses this walk with the Lord will know His blessing, both in time and eternity.

CONCLUSION

In summary, salvation is free. The Lord Jesus purchased it for us on the cross, and He offers it without cost to all who place their trust in Him. It is freely offered and freely received—there's nothing for us to pay. That's grace. Our justification before God is a one-time event that occurs the moment we believe in Christ. Good works are not a prerequisite, corequisite, or postrequisite to salvation. That is, beyond simple faith in Christ, nothing is required of us before, during, or after we believe in Him as our Savior. We are saved by grace alone (we don't deserve it), through faith alone (not by works), in Christ alone. Good works should follow salvation (Eph 2:10; Gal 6:10), but they are never the condition of it.

Once we are saved, God calls us into a lifelong process of sanctification. Sanctification is the life we live after being justified, and it continues until we leave this world—either by death or by rapture. The sanctified life requires us to learn and live God's Word (2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18), to walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38), to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), to walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16), and to make ongoing good choices that keep us on the path of God's will. Such a life honors God (1 Cor 10:31), edifies others (1 Th 5:11), and results in blessings for us (Luke 11:28). Believe in Jesus as your Savior and then choose a life of ongoing obedience to God. You'll be eternally grateful.