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SALVATION IN JESUS' NAME

In His holiness and love, God desires fellowship with his creatures, just as a loving father desires the company of his sons and daughters. For that fellowship to transpire, we need to be in a state of holiness as He is. The Apostle Peter writes, "But be holy in every detail of your lives, as he, whose servants you are, is holy; because it has been said in the Writings, 'You are to be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15,16)

So wherein lies the problem? The problem lies in us, with our motivations and our actions, which have been tainted and twisted as a result of the sins of our forefather, Adam. Paul writes in Romans 5:12, "Therefore just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and death spread to all because all have sinned." Our sin has separated us from God. In Isaiah 59 the prophet tells us, "Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things." (Isaiah 59:1-3) He goes on: "For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us and we honor our iniquities: rebellion and treachery against the LORD, turning our backs on our God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived." (Isaiah 59:12-13)

In the first chapter of Romans, the letter written by the Apostle Paul, the sinfulness of man is delineated in bold relief. First he establishes that men and women have forsaken the natural order instituted by God and gone over to perverse sexual appetites, which leads them to all sorts of idolatrous behavior. The result is that "God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness; they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die--yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them." (Romans 1:28-32)

Anyone who is honest and reads the above list of sins, (YES, SINS!) has to admit that we all have been guilty of some of them. So what's the problem? The problem is there is a price to pay. Continuing in Romans chapter 2, Paul declares "by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the Day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will repay according to each one's deeds; to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury." (Romans 2:5-8)

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In chapter 3 of Romans, verses 9-12, Paul intensifies his case against sinful humanity. “..For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks (Jews and non-Jews), are under the power of sin, as it is written: ‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.’”

There is a price to pay for sin, for failing to live in the way God has ordained for mankind. Jesus said in John 8:24 “I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I Am.” In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus describes a man who was uncaring and unsympathetic to the plight of those around him, and who then died. He is described as being in Hades and is even quoted as saying, “I am in torment in these flames.”

In 2 Thessalonians 1, verses 8 and 9, Paul promises that the Lord Jesus will inflict “vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.” Some have difficulty accepting that the punishment for sin would be a place of torment, but that is what the Scripture says. Whether the flames mentioned in the Bible are literal or symbolic, it signifies something unbelievably horrid, something from which to flee, into the arms of a loving, redemptive God. As for that place of punishment, Jesus said in Matthew

25:41, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” It is a place not originally intended for mankind, but for the devil and his demons. God does not want for you to go there!

When asked the question, “Why do you think God would let you into heaven?”, many say, “Because I am a good person.” The above verses stand in stark disagreement with such a response. When judged by the standard of love that God intends for humanity, none can pass the test, for we have all inherited sin from our forefather Adam. We all stand condemned when we attempt to prove ourselves worthy before a holy God. Some would say, “Sure I have done some bad things, but look at all the good I have done.” That’s like saying, “Sure I stole some money, but I gave part of it to the Church.” James says, “Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.” (James 2:10) In other words, if you break the law, you break the law. There is a price to pay.

But praise God, there is hope! There is a provision for us, that we may come under the blessing of a loving Redeemer. Jesus declared, “I have come that they may have life, and life abundantly.” (John 10:10) In Matthew 20:28 he also stated, “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Jesus, whom Paul acknowledged as without sin, “was made to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) As Jesus bore witness in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,

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so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." He died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins, so that when we trust in Him and His redemptive work, God considers us righteous because of that faith.

The Gospel is summarized in Romans 1:16,17. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: First for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" That is the message of Paul in Romans 3:23-26: "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his own righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus."

When it says "he justifies" it means that he, God, considers righteous the person who has faith in Jesus and his redemptive sacrifice on the cross. Our righteous standing with God is based on THAT ALONE, and not on any works of our own. Even that faith to believe is not the product of our own initiative, but of God's. Jesus said in Matthew 11:27,28, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father

except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." He also said, "No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise him up on the last day." John 6:44.

Paul explains it clearly in Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God--not the result of works so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

First, we need to agree with God about sin. The things God defines as sinful, upon close examination, are things that diminish and destroy the human character. They are actions and thinking that are below the righteous standard God expects of us. When we commit sexual sin, we have debased ourselves from the standard of committed love between two individuals of opposite gender. The human representation of the commitment between Christ and the Church is fouled. The stability of a relationship which will procreate and nurture children is lost.

When we become intoxicated with alcohol or drugs, we foul the clarity of mind God desires for us so we can think clearly and avoid the pitfalls of life. When we speak obscenely, we diminish the virtue of ourselves and those who hear us, fouling our spirits and others. This renders us incapable of communion with a loving God, in which is the highest level of personal satisfaction. So you see, sins are destructive. That is why God wants us to

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turn from them. On the day of Pentecost, Peter told the crowd, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

To repent means to change our way of thinking and feeling about something. We were heading in the wrong direction. We come to understand that. We turn and head in the right direction, in our thinking and affections. In this case, we were living in a way that insults God and destroys us. We agree with God, ask His forgiveness, trust in the sacrifice of Jesus as the payment for our sins, and seek God's power to live in a way that pleases Him. We ask Him to send the Holy Spirit to take up residence on our hearts and make us into a temple for the Living God. When that happens, Jesus says we then possess eternal life. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

When this happens, something truly marvelous takes place: You become a new creation! Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" You then enter into a relationship with God that opens a whole new life and a vast realm of possibilities you formerly could not claim. You have then embarked on a life of ongoing growth into the very character of the Living God.

I invite you to pray this prayer with me: "Father God, I see that you are a holy, loving God and that I have sinned against you and myself by walking in a way that displeases you. I trust in what Jesus Christ did when he died on the cross to purchase my salvation. I ask you to forgive my sins, based on what Jesus did for me and not based on my own goodness. Cleanse me by the power of His shed blood and come dwell in me by your precious Holy Spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit, enable me to live in a way that pleases you. In Jesus name I pray. Amen."

We invite your response to this message. If you have prayed to receive Christ, please let us know, and seek out a church where Jesus is the focus of attention. If you feel led to contribute to this effort, send correspondence to:

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