

Secure Now and Forever

How Are We Saved?

Early 20th Century British thinking said that if parents gave their children too much attention, they'd spoil them. For this reason, royal surgeon Sir Anthony Bowlby and his wife Mary placed all six of their children with nannies. One of those children, John Bowlby, ended up pioneering a field of psychology called attachment theory. This man who'd only been allowed to see his own mother for one hour a day, and who was sent away to boarding school at the age of seven, taught the world that secure attachment to a parent provided the neurological and psychological basis for robust mental and relational health throughout life.

According to attachment theory, our childhood bonds leave us with patterns that continue into adulthood. Poor attachment to parents may result in anxious, insecure attachment styles, or styles that avoid attachment altogether. The healthiest style is secure attachment, which predicts such things as emotional intelligence,¹ lower likelihood of addiction,² lower criminality,³ better coping with losses,⁴ lower PTSD,⁵ lower likelihood of divorce,⁶ and better overall resilience.⁷

God, the Architect of the human psyche, knows how to build a soul through secure bonds. This is why He has created security for us in His love. In Jesus Christ we are secure for now and forever.

Announcing the birth of Jesus to Joseph, the angel said, “He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). That word “save,” *sozo* in Greek, means to make something safe or secure. “May Your salvation, O God, set me securely on high” (Psalm 69:29).⁸

God is the ultimate Source of secure parental bonds. He has made, is making, and will make us secure in three stages: First, He has saved us all from the penalty of sin. Second, those who believe are being saved from the power of sin. Third, His followers on earth will be saved from the presence of sin when He comes again.

We:

are already saved from the penalty of sin;
are being saved from the power of sin;
will be saved from the presence of sin.

¹ <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ837780>

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306460304003090>

³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178914000330>

⁴ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/153250202753472291>

⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0887618515300013>

⁶ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10502556.2018.1558856>

⁷ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0033294118785577>

⁸ NASB 1995

The Penalty of Sin

Before we can fully appreciate this blessed truth, we must define a few things.

Sin is, by definition “lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4). Since God’s law describes His character of love, sin is, in essence, failing to love unselfishly. Each time we fall short of embodying the principle of self-giving for the good of others, we sin. On this basis, who can claim sinlessness? All sin and fall short of the glory, or character, of God (See Romans 3:23). And what is the penalty for this? Bluntly, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). But what is death? The Bible actually identifies two different kinds, the first death and the second death.

First Death- Jesus called the first death “sleep” because it, like sleep, is temporary. Jesus said of the synagogue ruler Jairus’s deceased daughter, “The child is not dead, but sleeping” (Mark 5:39). He said of the deceased Lazarus, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up” (John 11:11). Jesus famously raised Lazarus from the dead, just as He will raise each one of us who have fallen asleep in Him. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Second Death- The second death is, by contrast, permanent. Those who die the second death will never rise again. In the second death the soul itself, the personality and character, is banished to eternal non-existence. Those who die this death say goodbye to life forever. “The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

To summarize:

For believers, the first death ends with the first resurrection.

For unbelievers, the second resurrection ends with the second death.

Did Jesus die the first or the second death? Let’s consider some symbolism from the Old Testament. According to Mosaic law, executed criminals, which were sometimes hung on trees, were not left hanging all night because “he who is hanged is accursed of God” (Deuteronomy 22:23). Being accursed of God meant one was unforgiveable. Quoting this law, Paul said, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us. For it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13). Christ redeemed us, or bought us back, from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. He made forgiveness possible. And He did it by staying on that Cross all through the dark night of soul.

Think of the trials of Jesus. He stands before the Roman court, the leaders of the Jews insisting that He be crucified. The Romans would have ignored a stoning, but crucifixion required Roman support and cooperation. As much as the Jews hated to ask anything of their captors, they hated Jesus more. Why were they so intent upon crucifying Him? Because in the mind of a Jew

crucifixion meant the second death—goodbye to life forever. They wanted Jesus to be treated as the vilest of criminals. They wanted Jesus cursed.

And, strangely, God wanted this too.

The meaning of the Cross, the tree of darkest night, was that Jesus bore our sin as if it was His own. And God, His beloved Father, the heart of His heart, turned His gaze away. While the Son grew dark with sin, the Father of light could not assure His Son of heaven's acceptance. The incompatibility of sin and holiness played itself out right then and there.

Because Jesus died the equivalent of this second death, He is the only person who has ever truly died. And if He had His way, this is how it would remain. The fires of hell are “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41) not for us!

Out of all this heavy, dark truth comes good news: Just as the sin of Adam condemned the human race, the Cross of Jesus justified, or reversed the condemnation, of humanity. He saved us all from the penalty of sin.

For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:16b-17

The Power of Sin

God created humans with a free will. If we so choose, we may reject all the bountiful provisions of God's plan to save us. Although through the Cross Jesus has made a mighty shelter from the penalty of sin, we may step out from under that shelter and be lost in the end. This is why, in order to be secure now and forever, we also need to be rescued from the power of sin, from our own perverse will. This occurs when a greater power comes into our inmost hearts. That power is grace, received through faith.

The Bible mentions grace nearly 150 times. It has two basic definitions: unmerited favor and inexhaustible power.

Unmerited Favor means simply that God approves of us in spite of our unrighteousness.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

Grace is favor we don't deserve. Our good works don't increase God's desire to give us this grace; He has already given it in Jesus Christ. It is like the atmosphere, free to us if we will just breathe it in. God gave us grace "in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

But while we can't earn it, God's grace in our lives will lead to good works. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." God has created us to do amazing things, which we have only begun to experience.

Inexhaustible Power- The apostle Paul prayed earnestly that his "thorn in the flesh," thought possibly to be problems with his eyesight, would be taken away. God didn't see fit to remove the thorn, but He did console Paul:

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Notice that grace is comparable with strength and power. We can't exhaust this power because it comes from an inexhaustible supply source, the illimitable God. Jesus as humanity's High Priest stands ready to give us access to this power, urging us to "come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

We often talk about how hard it is to be saved, and how easy to be lost. But is that true? God said to the persecutor Saul, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5).⁹ To live a life of sin we must oppose God, His design, and effectively reality itself. This brings distressing consequences! It is true that to live obediently we must resist our fallen nature and the world, but the result is the "peace that surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Both obedience and disobedience are hard in their own way. As they say, choose your hard.

The Presence of Sin

Our time on earth will be a battle. Following Jesus will put us at odds with the world around us and with our own fallen natures. Thank God that soon He will come again. We will "see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30b). He will "transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Philippians 3:21a). In returning to earth, King Jesus will deliver us completely from the presence of sin within and without.

Within- Paul said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells" (Romans 7:18), and "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). Sin is embedded in our fallen nature. Yet listen to this good news:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and

⁹ Goads are sharp, painful spurs used to prod animals.)

the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

God will change our natures when He returns!

Without- For the first 1000 years after Jesus comes, the devil will be confined to earth while we enjoy heaven (See Rev. 20:2). Then he will be destroyed along with his fallen angels and the wicked entities of the earth (See Rev. 20:7-15). Then the former things will pass away, and “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 21:4). Sin and sinners will be no more. Never again will we feel the pull of temptation, either from within or without.

The Takeaway

God has it all figured out, doesn't He? He has wrapped the human family in a security blanket most of them don't even feel! Yet without His protection we would all die. His salvation comes as a gift to us, but at infinite cost to Himself. What did He die for? Us! As we behold His sacrifice, we long for Him to receive the reward of our love and worship for eternity.

Quiz

1. We are already saved from the _____ of sin; are being saved from the _____ of sin; we will be saved from the _____ of sin.
2. For believers, the first death ends with the first resurrection. For unbelievers, the second _____ ends with the second _____.
3. In Mosaic law, anyone hung on a tree was _____.
4. The only person who has ever truly died is _____.
5. The two meanings of grace are unmerited _____ and inexhaustible _____.
6. For Paul, and for us, to resist God was/is _____.
7. God will deliver us from the presence of sin both _____ and _____.
8. Salvation comes as a free gift to us, but at _____ cost to God.

Answer Key

(Cover these answers while you fill in the blanks.)

1. Penalty, power, and presence
2. Resurrection, death
3. Accursed
4. Jesus
5. Favor, power
6. Hard
7. Within, without
8. Infinite

