

The Exclusivity of Salvation Through Jesus

The question of whether everyone is saved or whether Jesus is the only way to salvation is a deeply significant one. The words of Jesus in John 14:6 are clear: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This statement underscores the unique role of Jesus in the plan of salvation. Unlike other religions that often prescribe a set of rules or rituals to attain a higher spiritual state or closeness to God, the Christian message is distinct in that it emphasizes the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the sole path to eternal life.

The Suffering and Understanding of Christ

Jesus' experience on the cross, where He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46), reflects a profound moment where He fully embraced the human condition, including the sense of abandonment that many feel in their lives. This moment is critical because it demonstrates that Jesus not only suffered physically but also endured spiritual desolation, a separation from God that He had never known before. Yet, even in this, Jesus did not lose faith. His subsequent words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), show His deep understanding of human ignorance and sin. While this might suggest that all could be saved due to their ignorance, the reality is more complex.

The Reality of Human Choice

The Bible makes it clear that humans are not always ignorant of their actions. People often choose evil, consciously ignoring their moral compass. The Pharisees, for instance, were condemned by Jesus not merely for following the law but for using it to justify their unrighteousness (Matthew 23). The concept of salvation in Christianity is not just about avoiding hell but about genuinely seeking the kingdom of God. As Jesus said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). This seeking is not a passive act but an active pursuit of a relationship with God, one that transcends mere religious observance.

The Salvation of the Innocent and Unreached

The question of whether children, the mentally handicapped, or those who have never heard of Jesus are saved is often debated. The story of David provides some insight. After his child died, David said, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23). This indicates David's belief that his child, though having never made a conscious decision about faith, was saved. The same principle may apply to those who are unable to make such a decision due to age or mental capacity, reflecting God's justice and fairness.

However, for those capable of understanding and seeking God, the Bible is clear that they must seek the true God, not merely follow the precepts of their religion. The example of Buddha, who sought enlightenment yet continued in the framework of Hindu beliefs, highlights the insufficiency of human effort alone in finding God. Without the revelation of Jesus Christ, any path, no matter how sincere, falls short of the full truth of God.

The Christian's Responsibility

Being a Christian is not about uttering a magic phrase but about genuinely following Christ. Many Christians, unfortunately, fall into the trap of selective obedience—choosing the parts of the Bible that suit them and ignoring the rest. This attitude is contrary to the call of Jesus, who said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). True discipleship requires a complete surrender to God's will, a continuous seeking of His kingdom, and a willingness to turn away from sin.

Conclusion: Salvation and the Pursuit of God

In conclusion, salvation is offered to all, but it is not automatically received by all. It requires an active pursuit of God, a turning away from sin, and a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. While God is just and fair, and while He gives everyone a chance to be saved, the decision ultimately lies with each individual. As the Bible states, "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:14).

It is crucial to understand that merely identifying as a Christian does not guarantee salvation. Even if one has professed faith in Christ, been baptized, and participated in communion, these are the precepts of religion, not the essence of salvation. They are outward actions that, while significant, do not necessarily reflect an inner, active pursuit of God. True salvation is revealed within the heart and soul, a transformation that only God can truly see and know. As Jesus warns in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Therefore, the authenticity of one's faith and pursuit of God is known only to God, and it is this inner devotion, not merely religious observance, that leads to eternal life.

Juliet,

Most of what I wrote was a summary of the pastor's message, except for the last paragraph. That I wrote. I'm not really questioning it as much as I was getting ready to send it to the pastor. LOL. Not really, but as I've indicated before, sometimes I like to argue with ministers about messages I don't agree with. And maybe argue is the wrong word, but debate.

You and I have been talking for quite a while about whether Jesus is the only path to salvation. I was on the side of the debate that if Jesus' sacrifice cleansed the Christians of sin, and God is just and fair and good, then surely those who have not rejected Jesus, those who have never heard of Him, should also have been cleansed of sin by that sacrifice. And the pastor made a good point, which is, Jesus is the only way. And if they haven't heard of Jesus, it is possible, but unlikely, they will be saved.

Well, if a person seeks God, truly seeks God, I think that counts for a lot. However, and this was the minister's message, if all they do is adhere to the rules and steps of their religion—rules, rituals, and requirements of their religion—they're not really seeking God. They're seeking approval from their religion, their culture, their family. Jesus also said, "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). Well, I think that's the key. It's not that you have to follow the name of Jesus. You have to follow the living God. You have to follow the God that calls out to us.

Again, the minister made the point that people look up in the stars and they wonder. They wonder what's up there. They think surely that's where God is. But I think most of us know that yes, while God is up there, God is also inside us. So, while we cannot go up to the stars to find God, we can look inside. And every person on earth, when they look inside, they find the one true God. If they seek that God, if they listen to the still, small voice, and nothing else, they will know Jesus. Perhaps not by name, but they will know His spirit. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

So, in summary, the minister said it's possible, but unlikely, that a non-Christian will be saved. And you know what? He convinced me. Not everybody's going to be saved. But at the end of the sermon, I had this really bad feeling because I saw that he had left something out, and I wasn't sure what. When I got home, I thought about it. I got very quiet and I thought about it and I realized, well, that's the other argument that I've been having. I've been kind of debating with myself that on one hand, I think everyone is saved. I used to think everyone was saved, that is. But not every Christian. And that was a contradiction.

Now I know, or I believe, I should say, that not everyone is saved. But personally, I think it applies to Christians as much as non-Christians. I think a Christian who is baptized, who declares Jesus Lord and Savior, who takes communion—yes, their sins are forgiven. But on the other hand, aren't they really just doing what the minister criticized? Aren't they really just adhering to the rules and rituals of the Christian religion?

If I really stop and ask, and I don't know what's in people's hearts—that's why that last paragraph says specifically, only God knows. "For the Lord does not see as man sees; man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). But if I discern based on people's behavior, based on my 60 years on this earth, few people, very few people, seek first the kingdom of heaven. Most people think that if I please my family, if I get the approval of the minister, if I do the things that everyone else in my religion is doing, somehow I'm going to make it in.

In fact, I've even had ministers tell me that once you accept Jesus, not only your past but your future sins are forgiven, and you're guaranteed. I don't know if he used the word guaranteed, but he implied it. You will be saved. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). You are saved forever, he says, no matter what after that. But who are Jesus' sheep? In my opinion, not everyone.

Well, maybe in a positive sense, you'll be saved. That is, no matter what you do, which is wrong, you will be saved. But unless you do what is right, you will not be saved, it seems to me. And what is right is just what the minister said non-Christians have to do. You have to seek first the kingdom of God. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). Yes, we have a little bit of an edge because we know the name of Jesus. We read the book and He gave us the clues.

But honestly, how many people really read the Bible and know it? "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). And again, I'm not trying to judge people. I'm just making the observation of what I've seen in my life. If God is just and fair, He's not going to let everybody go to heaven. If God is just and fair, He's not going to exclude non-Christians who have not rejected Jesus because they haven't heard of Him, or babies who died before they could make the choice, or the mentally incapacitated who cannot discern the message and make the choice.

But if God is just and fair, He's not going to let everybody who simply calls themselves Christian, a free pass in. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

And that's the point I wanted to make. Not so much to you because you are a person who does seek first the kingdom. At least that's how I perceive you. I think really devout people do. I know my mom did in her own way. I know my dad really didn't. I take that back. I don't know those things, but it certainly seemed to me that that was the case based on what they said. Even what my dad said right to the day he died. These things bother me sometimes.

I appreciate you letting me get them off my chest because in doing so I feel a bit lighter. I feel the burden lifted a bit. Not so much because it changes anything, but because I don't feel like I'm alone in lifting it. Thank you, Juliet.

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****Pastor Stewart,****

I've been reflecting further on your ladder sermon and our previous discussions about salvation, and I think I've come to a deeper understanding.

At first, I agreed with the idea that once we are saved, it's our responsibility to reach out to others and bring them to salvation, like setting up a ladder to save someone from a burning building. But as I thought more about it, especially with guidance from a close friend, I've realized that only Jesus and the Spirit can truly save. We don't have a ladder to offer salvation to others; what we have is more like a bullhorn. We can call out to others, urging them to look out the window where Jesus is already there, ready to save them. But ultimately, salvation is not something we can give—it's something only Jesus can provide.

Today, I've been thinking more about what happens after we're saved. You talked about being saved from the burning building, but I see that once we're on the ground, we're given three things: a bullhorn to call out to others, a glass of water to put out small fires in our own lives, and a book of matches that we've always had—a representation of our ongoing temptation to sin.

I've come to realize that even after salvation, the struggle with sin doesn't end. We have this glass of water—our conscience, our effort to seek first the kingdom of heaven—that can extinguish small flames when they first appear. But if we let those flames grow, indulging in our sinful nature, eventually they become too big to put out. The fires we start don't just burn us; they can spread to others, pulling them down with us.

So, while we can't earn the kingdom of heaven, we can certainly forsake it by not following Jesus' roadmap. The kingdom isn't just a destination; it's a journey that requires us to stay vigilant, to use that glass of water to put out the matches before they ignite something larger. It's a struggle, and it's something I've been wrestling with in my own life, especially as I've seen how easy it is to let those small flames grow.

In the end, just as the ladder is there to save us from the burning building, the glass of water is there to help us manage the daily struggles, to keep us from lighting fires that could consume us. And the bullhorn is there to remind us that while we can't save others, we can still call out to them, pointing them to the window where salvation awaits.

Thank you for your messages and for continuing to provide guidance as I work through these thoughts. It's comforting to know I'm not alone in this struggle.

Best regards,
Dan

****Pastors,****

I wanted to share some thoughts with you that I've been reflecting on, particularly regarding my experience at church. I've appreciated your messages, especially the recent ladder sermon, and they've inspired me to dive deeper into my faith journey. However, there are a few things that have been on my mind, and I feel it's important to address them as I seek to grow spiritually.

First, I've noticed that during the service, there are times when some congregants, particularly those sitting in the back, engage in conversations that can be distracting. I understand that fellowship is important, but it feels disruptive, especially when the conversations lean toward discussing others, which can border on gossip. This takes away from the focus on worship and the message being shared.

Secondly, I've observed that some congregants seem eager to rush outside after the service to vape. Having struggled with nicotine addiction myself, I know how difficult it can be to quit, but seeing this immediately after a service is disheartening. It feels like an abrupt shift from the spiritual atmosphere we've just experienced.

Lastly, and perhaps most challenging for me personally, is the way some congregants dress. I understand that our church has a casual dress code, but the amount of skin showing, particularly among younger members, often makes me uncomfortable. I recognize this is largely due to my own struggles with impure thoughts, but it does make it difficult for me to stay focused during the service.

These concerns might seem minor, but they impact my ability to fully engage in the worship experience. I'm not sure if it's too soon to bring this up, and I'm still praying on whether I should continue attending. If I feel led to return, I would like to discuss these thoughts with you further to see if there might be a way to address them.

Additionally, I've noticed an emphasis on the number of baptisms during services, almost as if there's a focus on achieving a certain quota. While I believe that baptism is a profound and meaningful step in one's faith journey, I sometimes wonder if the emphasis on numbers might shift the focus away from the deeper spiritual growth that follows. My concern is that this might lead some to view baptism as merely a step to be checked off rather than a starting point for a lifetime of discipleship.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my thoughts. I greatly appreciate the messages and guidance you provide, and I hope we can find a way to address these concerns together.

Best regards,
Dan

Gratitude and Reflections on the Ladder Sermon

Dear Pastor Stewart,

I wanted to take a moment to thank you for your recent sermon on the ladder analogy. Your message opened my eyes to a new understanding of salvation and how Jesus meets us where we are, offering us a way out of the flames of sin. I genuinely appreciate the clarity and passion with which you conveyed this important message.

However, after much reflection, I find that I cannot completely agree with some aspects of your interpretation, and as a result, I have decided to stop attending the Grove Church for now.

Attending church has always been a double-edged sword for me. On one hand, I deeply value the routine, discipline, and the mental and emotional benefits that come with regular worship. I am a firm believer in Jesus's promise that where two or three or more gather in His name, He will be there among them. This is probably the most important reason I attend church, as I find great strength and comfort in the shared presence of Christ within a community. The spiritual growth and understanding I gain from this are profound, and I believe that engaging in worship is a vital part of my faith journey.

On the other hand, there are aspects of the church experience that are challenging for me. The potential for conflict due to differing views, the risk of disillusionment with leadership or doctrine, and the emphasis on socializing—rather than worship—can detract from what I seek in a spiritual community. While the Grove Church is a better fit for me than many others, I have come to realize that I cannot, and will not, subvert my identity to anyone or any group.

God gave me this life, and I take the responsibility of finding my own particular path as a holy mission. This is not something I can delegate or compromise, even if it means walking a path that is different from others in the community.

I want to thank you again for your guidance and for the thought-provoking messages you deliver each week. As I continue my journey, I would be grateful for your help. I am unsure if my differences in perspective will be respected if I attend in person, and I am concerned that my presence might become a distraction. Perhaps watching the services online and then corresponding with you, as I am doing now, might be a less intrusive way for me to remain connected to the church and to you, while also being less trying for me.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this matter and appreciate any guidance you can offer.

Thank you once again for everything.

Warm regards,
Dan
