

A photograph of a person standing on a rocky peak, looking out over a vast mountain range under a cloudy sky. The image is framed by a dark red border at the top and bottom. The title 'UNDERSTANDING SALVATION' is overlaid on the top half of the image in a large, brown, serif font. The author's name 'BAYLESS CONLEY' is overlaid on the bottom half of the image in a smaller, dark red, sans-serif font.

UNDERSTANDING SALVATION

BAYLESS CONLEY



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B A Y L E S S C O N L E Y

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JOHN 3:16-17

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE. FOR GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT THAT THE WORLD THROUGH HIM MIGHT BE SAVED.”

INTRODUCTION

The verses at the beginning of this booklet, John 3:16–17, are some of the most important verses in the Bible. But they are often quoted with little thought as to what they really mean.

What does it mean to be “saved”?
What does it mean to “perish”? And what is “everlasting life”?

In the following pages, I want to answer these simple but profound questions. But in order to do so, it will help us to go back to the beginning...

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

In the book of Genesis, we are told that when God made Adam, the first man, that “... the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”¹

There was more to Adam than met the eye. His flesh and blood body was just the house he lived in. The real man, the one living on the inside, was a spirit being.

We read also in the Genesis account that God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.”² Jesus tells us in the New Testament that,

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.³

Therefore we understand that since God is a spirit, and man was made in His image and likeness, man is also a spirit being.

Think about that for a moment. There is more to you than meets the eye. Your physical body is just the house you live in. The real you—the person living on the inside—is a spirit being.

And when the physical body dies, the true person lives on... eternally. But where?

MADE TO WALK AND TALK WITH GOD

When man and woman were created by God, they were made to walk and talk with God. They were created to be part of God's family. But something terrible happened...

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."⁴

This is a pretty simple command it would seem, but the temptation proved to be too much for Adam and his wife, Eve. We are told in Genesis chapter three that Satan came into their garden home in the form of a serpent, tempting them to partake of this one tree that God had forbidden.

God claimed the exclusive right to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He alone would decide what was right and wrong, what was sin, and what was not. He plainly told Adam that if he ever chose to violate this one prohibition, then he would die.

God made it clear that if Adam and Eve were to continue enjoying their relationship with their Creator in their garden paradise, they must remain under His government and authority.

But Adam and Eve chose differently. They believed what Satan told them. Here is the lie they were told...

“You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁵

Adam and his wife chose to disregard God’s command and to no longer be under His authority.

In essence they were saying, “God, we will decide for ourselves what’s right and wrong. Just because You say something is a sin or evil doesn’t make it so. There are no absolutes. What is wrong for someone else may not be wrong for me. We don’t want to be under Your government any longer.”

A DOUBLE DEATH

God specifically told Adam that in the day he ate of that tree he would die. But if you read the biblical account, Adam didn't die that day. He and his wife Eve lived for many years after that event.

So what gives? Did God lie? Was He just trying to scare them? Not at all. What happened to Adam and Eve that day is exactly what God predicted would happen.

In the original Hebrew text, the word die appears twice. God literally said: "You

will die, die.” Or, “You will die a double death.” And that is precisely what occurred.

Adam and Eve did die that day. They died spiritually! What that means is they were cut off from the life of God. Their relationship with their Creator was severed.

As a result, they would also die a physical death at some later time.

They died a double death!

THE FOUNTAINHEAD

You may ask, “What does all this have to do with me?” Everything!

You see, Adam and Eve’s sin didn’t affect just them; it impacted the entire human race, including you and me. Adam and Eve were the beginning, the fountainhead, the father and mother of all people. The result of their rebellion was that the entire human race was plunged into a state of spiritual separation from God.

The book of Romans puts it this way:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned....⁶

The Message Bible states this passage this way... which makes it very clear:

You know the story of how Adam landed us in the dilemma we're in—first sin, then death, and no one exempt from either sin or death. That sin disturbed relations with God in everything and everyone, but the extent of the disturbance was not clear until God spelled it out in detail to Moses. So death, this huge abyss separating us from God, dominated the landscape from Adam to Moses. Even those who didn't sin

precisely as Adam did by disobeying a specific command of God still had to experience this termination of life, this separation from God. But Adam, who got us into this, also points ahead to the One who will get us out of it.⁷

THAT CRAZY MISSING PIECE TO THE PUZZLE

Intuitively, every human being senses that something is wrong. We all know that something is missing from our lives. It's like there is this crazy missing piece to life's puzzle that we just can't find.

People try to fill that inner void with many different things. Some abuse drugs and alcohol trying to fill the empty place in their hearts. Others run from woman to woman or from man to man trying to fill that void with human relationships. Some turn to religious ritual while others try to

find peace through excelling in business or by accumulating more possessions.

But all of those things are a dead end because the void we feel is a God-shaped hole in our hearts. It's a hole that can only be filled through a personal relationship with God Himself.

Our need was too great, our situation too deep and desperate, and our spiritual state of such a nature that we could not rescue ourselves. We were put in this dilemma not only because of Adam's transgression, but because we are all guilty of sin as well.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul makes it clear that the whole world stands guilty before God, for all have sinned.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....⁸

So God had to act on our behalf because we were helpless... unable to rescue ourselves from the death sentence of sin.

GOD'S REMEDY

This is where the good news comes in. When we could not rescue ourselves, God came to rescue us. When we could not reach up to God, He reached down to us. When we could not redeem ourselves, He paid the price to redeem us.

And to accomplish that, He did something so amazing the heart can scarcely take it in:

He sent His own Son to take our place and to bear the death penalty for our sins.

The “wages of sin is death,”⁹ and there was no way that a pure and holy God could come together with sinful people unless somehow the sin problem was dealt with. God’s righteous nature would not allow Him to overlook our sin... but His love nature would not allow Him to overlook us.

So He sent His Son, Jesus, to die in our place; the innocent for the guilty, the pure for the impure, the holy for the unholy. And Jesus willingly died as our substitute. He was arrested, put through a mock trial, beaten without mercy, and nailed to a cross as the sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins.¹⁰

PICTURE HIM

Take a moment and picture Jesus on the cross.

He healed the sick, raised the dead, comforted the downcast, and spoke words of life and truth both to individuals and to the multitudes. He did no wrong nor committed any sin, but now He hangs, suspended between heaven and earth, nailed to a rough piece of wood.

He is so disfigured from numerous beatings that He is hardly recognizable. His back is in ribbons from a Roman

whip. Some are hurling insults at Him when suddenly the sky turns dark. Jesus cries out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”¹¹

In that moment, God laid all of His wrath and punishment for our sins on Jesus. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.”¹² Then, under the weight of the world’s sin, Jesus died.

After three days the claims of God’s eternal justice were satisfied. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God raised His Son from the dead.

The price has been paid. The way back into a relationship with God is open. It’s not about empty ceremony or mindless ritual; it’s about walking and talking with God! It’s about the chance for the

very relationship God intended from the beginning. It's about becoming part of God's family.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

How are you and I to respond to such amazing news? What can a person do to accept such an astonishing gift? Listen to the apostle Paul's words, again from the book of Romans:

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth

confession is made unto salvation. For
“whoever calls on the name of the
Lord shall be saved.”¹³

That’s good news! There’s nothing
you can do to earn your way back into
favor with God. He’s paid the price
through His Son. Now it is only for you
to believe... to trust that the death and
resurrection of Jesus Christ has broken the
bonds of death and separation from God.
That’s when you are saved! And here’s
what it means.

BACK UNDER AUTHORITY

Being saved means being freed from the penalty of sin and being brought into an eternal relationship with God. It is about being connected with our Creator. In fact, this is what Jesus says:

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”¹⁴

When Adam sinned, he (along with all of us) was cut off from the life of God. When he decided to step out from under

God's authority, spiritual death entered his heart and infected the whole human race.

So when an individual repents of their sin and puts their faith in Christ, confessing Him as Lord, they are stepping back under God's authority. The life connection is then reestablished.

By the way, Lord is not some magic word. It means "boss" or "master." When someone believes and confesses Jesus as Lord, they are basically saying, "I die to my rights of independent living. Jesus, my life is now no longer my own to command; I put my life under Your authority and in Your care."

A NEW INWARD NATURE

The result of believing and confessing is so radical the Bible describes it in terms like “saved,”¹⁵ “born again,”¹⁶ and becoming “a new creation”¹⁷ in Christ. We literally receive “eternal life,”¹⁸ which is the phrase the Bible uses to describe the Greek word *zoe*, which literally means “the life of God.”

It is what Adam lost and what Christ has regained.

When we receive this life from God, it literally changes our inward nature. Our spirit, the real us, is brought back into relationship with God. The sin nature is removed from our hearts by God's Spirit and we are "saved." It also makes us ready for eternity.

WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

First, if you are reading this and you have not yet prayed to accept Christ, why not do it now? Here is a prayer you can pray:

“Dear God, I do realize that I am a sinner and that I need to be saved. I also realize that no good works or personal sacrifice on my part can make me right with You. I believe that Your Son, Jesus, did all the work needed to redeem me by dying on the cross. Jesus, thank You for willingly

going to the cross for me. Thank you for dying for my sins. I believe that You have been raised from the dead. I confess You as Lord. From this moment forward my life is not my own. All I am and all I have, I place in Your hands. Wherever You lead me, I will go. Amen.”

Finally, here are some important things to help you grow in your relationship with God:

1. PRAY

Spend time every day talking to God. Share your heart with Him. Then listen quietly for His answers.

2. READ THE BIBLE

The Bible, or “God’s Word,” is food for your spirit. It will work this “new nature” into the fabric of your everyday life. Read it expecting God to speak to you from its pages. Linger over it, savor it. Obey it. Become a person of “The Book.” (If you are just becoming acquainted with the Bible, I would suggest you begin in the Gospel of John and do most of your reading in the New Testament.)

3. GET CONNECTED WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

Become a part of a Bible-believing, God-worshiping, Jesus-adoring church.

4. TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS

This news is too good to keep to yourself! Tell others about what the Lord

has done for you. Serve people in practical ways. Let your light shine and always remain grateful for the mercy of God in your life.

Footnotes:

1. Genesis 2:7, New King James Version (NKJV)
2. Genesis 1:26, NKJV
3. John 4:24, King James Version (KJV)
4. Genesis 2:16–17, NKJV
5. Genesis 3:4-5, NKJV
6. Romans 5:12, NKJV
7. Romans 5:12–14, The Message
8. Romans 3:19, 23, NKJV
9. Romans 6:23, NKJV
10. For a complete description of the crucifixion, read Matthew 27.
11. Matthew 27:46, NKJV
12. 2 Corinthians 5:21, NKJV
13. Romans 10:9–10, 13, NKJV
14. John 17:3, NKJV
15. Romans 10:13, NKJV
16. John 3:7, NKJV
17. 2 Corinthians 5:17, NKJV
18. John 17:3, NKJV