

GOD'S METHOD OF SAVING SINNERS

Three men set out on a journey to find acceptance before God. Each boasted that his particular method of religious devotion would succeed, and that the other two would fail.

The Hindu was careful where he put his feet when he stepped outside so he would not crush any of God's creatures. He was kind to any rat he came across, as a rat was believed to have been a travelling companion to one of the Hindu gods. He even travelled to, and bathed himself in the river Ganges for spiritual cleansing.

The Muslim was careful to pray five times each day facing toward Mecca. He gave money to the poor, fasted on the month of Ramadan, went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and finally gave his life in a jihad (holy war) against infidels (those who do not follow the faith of Islam). This last act was in the belief that it would bring him instant access into his heaven where many carnal sensual pleasures awaited him.

The man who was proud to call himself a Christian went to Church twice every Sunday, confessed his sins every week, gave his money to the poor, prayed every day, and never missed Holy Communion.

The Hindu, the Muslim and the Christian finally died and stood before almighty God to face judgment. The Hindu was informed that his life was not acceptable in God's sight. He was cast into Hell where he longed for just a sip of water to cool his tongue, and he had no rest from his sins which were now a burden on his conscience. The Muslim and the Christian received the same fate.

The error of the three

The error of the three men was the same in each case. They all thought they could find acceptance before a holy and perfect God through their religious devotion. But God requires far more than religious devotion.

Jesus warned people of the high standard of righteousness which is required before a person can enter the kingdom of God, he said, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:20).

In another passage we learn that no person is able to attain the standard of righteousness required. The Bible says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23), i.e. no person is able to keep the law perfectly in thought and action. You might very well ask, "If the standard of God is so high, how can a sinner be saved?". This article will look at that question and related questions.

A Substitute Used in Old Testament Times

In the days before Christ, God provided a way by which the believer could have his sins symbolically covered through a sacrifice, "the sacrifice was the divinely instituted provision whereby the sin might be covered and the liability to divine wrath and curse removed." ¹ The animal became symbolically the substitute for the believer. Because an animal is not under God's law, it cannot break the law, so it is without sin, a fit symbolical substitute. The hand of the sinner was placed upon the head of the sacrificial animal, symbolically transferring the sins of the person to the animal.

The animal was then killed, symbolically bearing the death penalty for sins in place of the believer. "If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord. He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him." (Leviticus 1:3-4). See also Lev. 16:20-22. The sacrificial animal symbolically bears the sins.

Christ is the Substitute for Believing Sinners

These sacrifices pointed to the one who would not only bear fully the sins of believers, but would also live a life of perfect righteousness in their place, thus entitling them to all of the rewards due to a person meeting God's perfect standard of righteousness. The basic reward being eternal life with God. In time, God sent his Son Jesus Christ, to live a life of perfect righteousness in place of the believer, then to die in his place. When a sinner places his faith in Jesus Christ, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, i.e. reckoned or accounted to be his. It was prophesied in the Old Testament that one would come (Jesus), to be righteous on behalf of the sinner. "This is the name by which he will be called: **The Lord is our righteousness.**" (Jer. 23:6). Today, the Christian is able to say, "**Jesus is my righteousness**".

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the day when sinners could stand before God with a righteousness which is whiter than snow. "...Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." (Isaiah 1:18). This is possible because the righteousness of Christ is put to the account of the believer, that is why we read in the same chapter, "Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones with **righteousness.**" (Isaiah 1:27).

The importance of the righteousness of Christ is further made clear in another passage in Isaiah. He

promised that the righteousness of Christ would be imputed to the sinner. "He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be **accounted righteous**; and he shall bear their iniquities." (Isaiah 53:11, RSV).

To be *accounted righteous* is to have the righteousness of Christ put to your account. Righteousness is pictured as covering the believer like a robe. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has clothed me with the **robe of righteousness**, as a bridegroom decks himself with garland, and a bride adorns herself with her jewels." (Isaiah 61:10, RSV).

Jesus Christ, The Sinner's Righteousness

Paul in explaining the gospel to the Romans makes the point that in the gospel, the righteousness of God has been revealed, and that "he who through faith is righteous shall live." (Romans 1:17, RSV.).

Paul uses two examples to show that perfect righteousness is accounted (imputed) to the believer when he has faith in Jesus Christ. The first example is **Abraham**. In Romans 4:1-11, Paul shows that Abraham was accounted as righteous through faith before he was circumcised. "The purpose was to make him the father of all those who believe without being circumcised and who thus have **righteousness reckoned to them**." (Romans 4:11, RSV). "But the words 'it was reckoned to him', were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe on him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord." (Romans 4:23-24, RSV).

In the second example, Paul shows that death (both spiritual and physical), is passed on to all through the sin of **Adam**, but life is passed on to all who receive the free gift of righteousness - which is reckoned or imputed to those who have faith in Christ. "For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the **gift of righteousness** reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17).

As for the lasting benefit of this righteousness, the Bible says, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, **my righteousness will never fail**." (Isaiah 51:6). See also 51:8.

Self-righteousness Fails

Paul explains that the Jews try to establish their own righteousness, and so lose the righteousness that

is freely available through believing in Jesus Christ. He says, "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For being **ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God**, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified." (Rom. 10:2-4, RSV).

Paul is well qualified to speak of the failure of man to gain acceptance before a holy and righteous God. He was a Pharisee for many years and had sought to gain acceptance before God through zealous law-keeping. However, after coming to know Jesus Christ as his own personal saviour, Paul says of his past "...I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - **the righteousness that comes from God** and is by faith." (Philippians 3:8-9).

Christianity is the only religion in which faith is placed in another person for righteousness, all other religions require some form of law-keeping, or performance of religious duty for self-justification or self-righteousness, but on judgment day, only Christ will be found to be righteous enough and those who have his righteousness through faith.

The man who proudly called himself a Christian in our story, was in fact, not a Christian at all. He simply gave his life to well meaning religious acts in the name of Christianity. He had rejected the true source of righteousness - Jesus Christ - and had sought to gain his own righteousness.

Jesus Takes the Believer's Punishment

Jesus Christ not only gives the believer His righteousness, but he also takes the sins of the believer upon himself at the cross. The sins of the believer are imputed to Christ; this does not turn Christ into a sinner, but it does make him legally punishable for the sins of believers. These sins were legally paid for in his death on the cross. "God made him who had no sin **to be sin for us**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21).

The fact that Christ would bear the sins of his people was foretold seven hundred years before the event by Isaiah the prophet who declared, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has **laid**

on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:4-6).

The Objection to God’s Method of Saving Sinners

Some in the time of Paul, as in our time, objected to God’s method of justification, and made statements along the lines of, “If it is true that we are saved by grace and do not have to work toward our salvation, then why not sin that grace may abound?” The apostle Paul in reply said, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1, RSV). Here was a golden opportunity for Paul to say “you have misunderstood me; good works must accompany your faith for salvation”. But he cannot say that; he merely says “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (6:2, RSV).

Works are a sign of faith, they do not produce the faith that saves. Good works justify the believer before others as being saved. The book of James shows that faith which cannot express itself in action is not truly faith. See James 2:17-22.

The Example of Marriage

Some claim that acceptance with God which has a legal basis does not display the love of God; it is too cold and formal. Suppose for a moment that there was no legal basis to marriage, a young couple just live together on the basis that they feel a love for each other. Both partners may come and go as often as they like, as there are no legal ties whatsoever. It may seem good on the surface to base a relationship on feelings, however, both partners would soon feel very insecure in such a situation. Neither person could be sure that his or her partner would not suddenly feel unhappy about the relationship, go away for a long time, or perhaps even live with someone else.

Love needs to be able to express itself through law, to be able to say, “I will commit myself to you through the bad times as well as the good!”. In like manner, God through his law commits himself to the forgiven sinner. God sent his Son to live under the law and be found righteous, and then to die in the place of transgressors of the law, and finally to bind himself to the forgiven sinner with the promise that he will not leave us nor forsake us. This is the way in which true love will commit itself. So the law of God expresses the love of God, just as marriage based on law expresses the love that the couple have for each other.

Only Through Faith in Christ

To those who have not put their faith in Christ, I would like to give a warning against the temptation to place part of your faith in works or religious observance. God demands a perfect life for that perfect heavenly reward. Placing even a part trust in yourself for acceptance before a perfect God would be like the

scientist who knows that he needs pure water for an experiment, but instead, picks up a half-full glass of dirty water and simply tops it up with clean water.

He needs to go straight to the source of pure water. Likewise, all sinners need to go to the source of pure righteousness; Jesus Christ, and not put a part trust in themselves or any other source.

Salvation is solely through Jesus Christ who said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6). Because of the certainty of the salvation of those who put their trust in Christ, he is able to say, “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). See also John 3:36, 11:25-26, 12:46, 20:30-31, Acts 4:12, Rom. 8:1, 1 John 5:11-12.

Imputation - its meaning

A few comments on the meaning of imputing are warranted at this point because we are saved through the **imputed righteousness** of Christ, not through our own righteousness or religious observance. That was the mistake of the three pilgrims.

To impute something to a person means to set it to his account or to number it among the things belonging to him, to reckon it to him. If something is imputed to a person, it is made his legally; it is counted or imputed as his possession. To impute means to account, charge, credit, reckon, attribute. For example, put the righteousness of Jesus Christ to my account! “It makes no difference, so far as the meaning of imputation is concerned, who it is that imputes, whether man (Sam. 22:15) or God (Psalm 32:2); it makes no difference [as to] what is imputed, whether a good deed for reward (Psalm 106:30ff) or a bad deed for punishment (Lev.17:4); and it makes no difference whether that which is imputed is something which is personally one’s own prior to the imputation, as in the case above cited, where his own good deed was imputed to Phinehas (Psalm 106:30-31), or something which is not one’s own prior to the imputation, as where Paul asks that a debt not personally his own be charged to him (Philemon 18). In all these cases the act of imputation is simply the charging of one with something... when God is said to ‘impute righteousness’ to a person, the meaning is that He judicially accounts such a one to be righteous and entitled to all the rewards of a righteous person (Rom. 4:6,11)”.²

Because it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ which is imputed to the believing sinner, he or she stands before God with a righteousness which is greater than that of any angel in God’s sight.

Justification - its Meaning

“The Biblical meaning of ‘justify’ (Greek, *dikaioo*) is to pronounce, accept and treat as just, i.e. as, on the one hand, not penally liable, and, on the other, entitled to all the privileges due to those who have kept the law. It is thus a forensic term, denoting a judicial act of administering the law, in this case, by declaring a verdict of acquittal, and so excluding all possibility of condemnation. Justification thus

settles the legal status of the person justified.”³

The fact that justification means to declare and treat a person as just, and not to make him just, as some have claimed, can be seen quite clearly from a few examples in the Bible, e.g. “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord.” (Proverbs 17:15, KJV).

If justification were to mean ‘make just’, then those who justify the wicked would be deserving of praise, but because it means to **declare just**, those who justify the wicked are an abomination. In the next example we see that a man wanted to show himself to be in the right, he was not wanting to make himself right. “‘But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’” (Luke 10:29). See also Luke 16:15, Gal. 3:8. The same word is used in man’s reference to God. “And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God,...” (Luke 7:29, NKJV), i.e. they declared or acknowledged God to be just; they obviously could not make God just.

“If there is a dispute between men and they go to court, and the judges decide their case, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked,” (Deut. 25:1, KJV), i.e. they were to declare the righteous to be righteous; it was not the function of judges to make people righteous.

The highly regarded “*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*” says, “There is no lexical ground for the view of Chrysostom, Augustine, the Medievals and Roman [Catholic] theologians that ‘justify’ means, or connotes as part of its meaning, ‘make righteous’”.⁴ On the contrary, God declares the believer (at the moment of faith) to be righteous with the righteousness of Christ.

The court of God

To illustrate the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement, let’s consider a hypothetical situation in which a man comes before God on judgment day. God says to him, “Your good deeds fall short of what I require.” The man replies, “I do not trust in anything I have done, please look at my substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ.” God replies, “I have looked at your substitute and find him to be perfect in my sight, but there is the matter of your sins, they must be punished.”

The man replies, “I confess my sins are worthy of eternal punishment, but please look again at my substitute, I trust fully in Him.” God replies, “I have examined your substitute and see that he has fully borne the punishment for all of your sins by his suffering and death on the cross. I must grant you entrance into my heavenly kingdom because of what He has done.”

If our salvation was something which we could not be sure of, then that would have serious consequences as to the way we see ourselves and how we approach God. However, because our salvation is complete in Christ; that has positive consequences.

The consequences of salvation by faith

Certainty

Because of the certainty of the salvation which comes to those who put their trust in Christ, Jesus is able to say, “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).

Not by works

Christians do not work for their salvation:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (Galatians 3:10-11).

Assurance

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Rom. 5:1).

“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...’” (Acts 16:31). Note the certainty here and in other passages, there is no such thing as being half-saved.

“Whoever believes in the Son **has eternal life**, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” (John 3:26).

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him **shall not perish** but have eternal life.” (John 3:16).

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you **will be saved**. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’” (Romans 10:9-11). See also Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 1:18, Jeremiah 31:34.

“... God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Our complete and thorough salvation through the work of Christ establishes a confidence in God which could not otherwise be there. Some radical changes at the moment of saving faith include:

An inward change

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor.

5:17).

Adopted as sons of God

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become **children of God** - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (John 1:12-13).

“because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are **God’s children**.” (Romans 8:14-16).

“In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.” (Romans 9:8). See also Gal. 3:26, 4:4-6, Eph. 1:3, 1 John 3:1-2.

Father and son relationship

“‘And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you **as sons**: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.’” (Hebrews 12:5-8).

New Kingdom

When a person is saved through Jesus Christ, he or she is immediately transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

“giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the **kingdom of light**. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:12-14).

Those who come to God through Jesus Christ have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God. Although we have been spiritually transferred from one kingdom to another, the kingdom of God to which we now belong has not yet come in its full power and glory, that is why we pray, “your kingdom come...” (Mark 6:10).

A new name

God calls all those he has saved through his son Jesus Christ, ‘**saints**’.

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the **saints** in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:” (Ephesians 1:1. See also 1:15, 18, 3:18, 6:18).

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the **saints** in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:” (Philippians 1:1. See also 4:21-22).

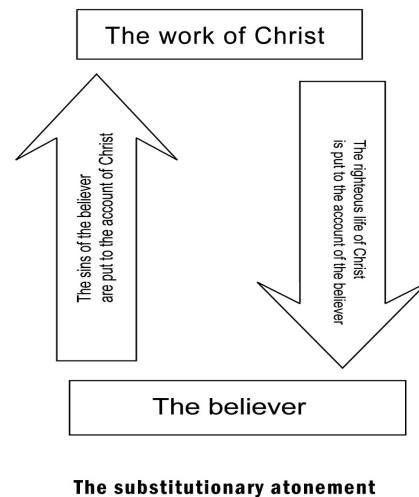
“Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the **saints** with them.” (Rom. 16:15).

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the **saints** throughout Achaia:” (2 Corinthians 1:1).

The saints are keen to serve each other. “For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the **saints**.” (2 Corinthians 8:3-4).

See also Colossians 1:4, 12, 26. 1 Timothy 5:10, Philippians 1:5, 7. Jude 1:3.

The diagram below illustrates the substitutionary atonement.



- The sins of the believer are put to the account of Christ. “God made him who had no sin to be **sin for us**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- The righteousness of Christ is put to the account of the believer. “... This is the name by which he will be called: The **LORD Our Righteousness**.” (Jeremiah 23:6). See also Rom. 5:17.

If a Christian is to meditate in a meaningful way on what God has done, then he needs to commit some key passages of Scripture to memory. Here is a short list.

Memory Verses

The need for righteousness

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:20).

Imputed Righteousness

“... This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.” (Jeremiah 23:6).

“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:17).

Our sins imputed to Christ

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Also Isaiah 53:4-6.

Assurance

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16).

“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).

Changed life

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Questions

1. Are we saved by a keeping of the law?
2. Is it necessary to be righteous in order to be saved?
3. Are we saved by a righteousness from God infused into our lives?
4. Do we receive our salvation solely through faith?
5. Is it possible to be saved if Jesus did not come as fully God and fully man?

Answers

1. Yes, not our law keeping, but by the law keeping of Christ. If Christ had not kept the law perfectly, we could not be saved. See Matt. 5:17-30. Note verse 20.
2. Yes, the perfect character of God demands a perfect

people to dwell with Him. Anything less falls short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Jesus said, “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:20). God’s demand for righteousness can only be found in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17).

3. No, we are not saved by a righteousness within ourselves. We are saved by a righteousness outside of ourselves in the person of Jesus Christ. A righteousness which is imputed to us (put to our account).
4. Yes, faith alone unites us to Christ and his saving work.
5. No. It was man who sinned, so our substitute also needs to be a man. Furthermore, it was God who was sinned against, therefore, nothing less than the second person of the Holy Trinity going to the cross, could secure an eternal salvation for all of his people.

If you have answered any of the above questions wrongly, then please read through this article again.

For discussion

This paper is brief so as to quickly introduce the young Christian to the main points regarding salvation. However, a study leader may like to elaborate, so a few points below have been added for further discussion.

Jesus came in the flesh

A false teaching in the time of the apostles was the claim that Jesus did not truly come in the flesh. According to this teaching, he only *seemed* to be in the flesh. This is a dangerous teaching because God’s law demands that a man be fully righteous in order to please him. That means, if Jesus was not truly a man, then, we do not have a substitute to stand in our place. This brings us to the nature of Christ. He was not 50% God and 50% man. He was 100% God and 100% man. He was **fully God and fully man**.

The idea that Jesus only seemed to be in the flesh comes out of docetism (from Greek, *dokein*, to seem). It is based on the Hellenistic (Greek) idea that all matter is evil. Consequently, the view was developed that Jesus was actually spirit, and only appeared to be in the flesh. The view that matter is evil is contrary to the declaration by God that his creation is good (Genesis Ch. 1). Because of the fall (sin of Adam) the flesh, in fact all of creation is subject to decay (Rom. 8:21), which is a different thing to claiming it is evil. Docetism began to find its way into the Church, so the apostle John answers this problem.

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has **come in the flesh** is from God, but every

spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus, is not from God.” (1 John 4:1-3).

Islam

Mohammed came into contact with a Christian sect which held to the false view that Jesus did not come in the flesh. He then adopted their false teaching about Christ. I had known for some time that Muslims had taken on this idea, however, I was not sure if in this more enlightened age, that they still held onto this teaching. Back in about 2004, I got into a discussion with a recent Muslim convert. He brought up the subject of the nature of Christ, and made the claim that Jesus only seemed to suffer on the cross. He did not have flesh. To emphasise the point about the flesh, he pinched the skin on his arm and pulled it. With this teaching, Mohammed has effectively destroyed the biblical doctrine of the substitutionary atonement.

Roman Catholicism

In Roman Catholic teaching, the deity of Christ is elevated, while his humanity is not highly considered. This in turn opens up the way for Mary worship, and the worship of the saints. Roman Catholics are encouraged to pray to Mary because she understands - a human face before God. In Ireland, the saints are highly elevated. When a Roman Catholic prays to Mary or one of the saints, they feel they need the intermediary to reach God, however, those who are truly saved know they can pay directly to their heavenly Father (Matt. 6:9). It is by the Holy Spirit that the Christian is able to call out to God, “Abba Father” (Rom. 8:15, Galatians 4:6). *Abba* is a term of endearment, equivalent to a child calling out, daddy!

It is only in evangelical (biblical) Christianity that the humanity of Christ is taken seriously. Without Christ coming into the world in the weakness of human flesh, there can be no salvation. Furthermore, Jesus understands our sufferings because he suffered himself, “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” (Heb. 2:18). Jesus was familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3).

Martin Luther (1483-1546) became a priest (Roman Catholic), however, even with the supposed advantage of being a priest, he struggled for quite some time to obtain a self-righteousness which would please a perfect holy God, even to the extent of putting himself through severe self-inflicted torment. However, by 1518, Luther discovered all his striving for self-righteousness was a complete failure. The prophet Isaiah says, “... all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; ...” (Isaiah 64:6).

Luther eventually discovered the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which he described as an *alien* righteousness to emphasise that it is not his own righteousness by which he is saved. The year of Luther’s conversion is placed at 1514 to as late as 1518.⁵

John Bunyan (1628-1688) was a Baptist preacher who spent twelve years intermittently in prison for his faith. This man, who produced the famous book, *Pilgrims Progress* made the point in his writings that he found great comfort in the fact

that the righteousness by which he is saved resides in none less than the second person of the Holy Trinity - Jesus Christ.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Understanding the doctrine of salvation (*soteriology* to give its technical name) is pivotal to understand why God is able to give to the redeemed, the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Firstly we must understand that it is through a man (Adam) that all of mankind lost the Holy Spirit. It is also through a man (Jesus Christ with his perfect righteousness), that the Holy Spirit comes to all who place their faith in Christ. See Gal. 3:2, Rom. 5:17.

- The sin of Adam brings spiritual death.
- The righteousness of Christ brings spiritual life.

Jesus said, “‘Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (John 7:38-39).

When the Lord Jesus Christ came before God with his perfect life, and was subsequently glorified, that gave the legal basis before God for the Holy Spirit to come upon all who trust in Christ. “**Whoever believes in me...**” (John 7:38).

Back in the 1970s and 80s, speaking in tongues (actually, glossolalia) was very popular. It was claimed by many that if you did not speak in tongues, then you did not have the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It was only after the serious moral failings of several prominent Pentecostal leaders (chiefly, the televangelist, Jimmy Swaggart) that people could no longer take seriously the view that people who spoke in tongues had an extra measure of the Holy Spirit.

Around that time, I challenged a Pentecostal pastor about the teaching. My question to him was, “If we are saved and given the Holy Spirit on the basis of the righteousness and death of Christ, then on what basis are we given the baptism of the Holy Spirit?” He could not answer the question.

- He could not say we are baptised in the Holy Spirit on the same basis, because that would destroy his false idea that there is another basis, and consequently, not all Christians have the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- He could not say we are baptised in the Holy Spirit on a higher basis, because there is no higher basis than the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul puts this question to the Galatians. “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?” (Gal. 3:2). The correct answer of course is, we receive the Holy Spirit through believing in the person and work of Christ.

Don’t mess with the gospel

Several years back I read about a pastor who declared to a large audience that the gospel is about putting yourself last; being inclusive of others; helping those on the margins of society etc. This pastor was confusing the gospel with the

fruit of the gospel.

- The **Gospel** is a **Christ-centred** message. It is the message by which people are saved (Rom. 1:16).
- The **fruit** of the gospel is the outworking of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. That outworking is evident to all because of the good works that are produced.

The **fruit** of the Holy Spirit involves a change of heart

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:22-24).

The fruit of the Holy Spirit involves a change of action

Jesus Christ was full of the Holy Spirit with the consequence that “he went around doing good” (Acts 10:38). “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” (Hebrews 10:24). Those moved by the Holy Spirit will put themselves last and help those in need.

The Gospel

There is an obligation upon all who preach to know what the gospel is. The apostle Paul states:

“... I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...” (Romans 1:16). People are saved through believing the gospel because it is a very special message, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith ...” (Rom. 1:17). See also Rom. 15:16.

A severe warning to those who depart from the gospel

The apostle Paul states, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:8-12).

Those who depart from the gospel in their preaching will forever wear the shame of what they have done. This passage is not stating that those who are genuine Christians and fail to understand and proclaim the gospel through laziness in study will be eternally *damned*. The word used is *condemned*. Those who depart from the Gospel in preaching will forever suffer some degree of loss. It is a very severe warning, shown by the fact that it is given twice.

End Notes

1. John Murray, “*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*”, Banner of Truth, 1961, p. 25.
2. Imputation, “*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*”, C.W. Hodge, James Orr, Gen. Ed., Eerdmans, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 1,462.

3. Justification, “*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*”, James I. Packer, Editors, E.F. Harrison, G.W. Bromley, C.F. Henry, Baker Book House, 1960, p. 304.
4. “*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*”, p. 304.
5. Luther, “*The International Dictionary of the Christian Church*”, Dr. J. Douglass, General Editor, Zondervan, Michigan, © 1974, p. 609.

Recommended Reading

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| Dr. Ernest Kevan | “Salvation”, Evangelical Press. |
| Gary Long | “Substitutionary Atonement” |
| B.A. Ramsbottom | “Bible Doctrines Simply Explained” |
| H.A. Ironside | “Full Assurance How to Know You're Saved” |
| F.F. Bruce | “The Defence of the Gospel in the New Testament” |
| Bruce L. McCormack | “Justification in Perspective”, Baker Books. This is for serious study at more than 200 pages and \$25-30. |
| Dr. M. Lloyd-Jones | “The Cross the Vindication of God”, (Booklet). |

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