

## Once and For All

Blaise Pascal, the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, scientist and mathematician, is credited with saying that there is a God-shaped vacuum in every person that can be filled only by Jesus Christ. And it's true! Inside every one of us there is a hole that we are unable to plug. We can pour in accomplishments, possessions and relationships but never reduce the size of the emptiness. Only God can fill our inner void and enable us to live fulfilled lives inside-out.

Tragically, there are many people in the Christian church who aren't quite sure whether their inner void is filled or not. They have gone through many, if not all, of the religious rituals. They have been baptized and catechized and communionized. They have prayed and confessed. Some have agonized for years over their salvation and still remain uncertain. How sad! These are people who never get around to living inside-out because they have never become sure of their salvation once and for all!

Could that be your nagging doubt? Could the question echoing in your mind and heart be "How can I be sure of my salvation?" If so, here are three answers to this all-important question. But this is not a multiple choice situation. All three are required.

First we must comprehend what salvation is all about. There are two truths that need to be comprehended. One is the gravity of sin and the other is the grace of God.

The Bible teaches that we have all sinned. We are sinners both by birth and by choice. Sin alienates us from God and grows at the root of every single problem we experience. Sin is the cause of the wars in our world as well as the worries in our souls. That is because sin is absolutely toxic. Sometimes we joke about sin. We talk about it. We experiment with it. We underestimate it. But

none of that changes a thing. Sin makes life miserable and death eternal.

Here's how it works. Unless the gravity of the sin in our lives is comprehended and confronted there is no way any of us can ever live an inside-out life. Until we comprehend and confront sin we are losers who are doomed to distress in this life and damnation in the next. Do you comprehend the gravity of your sin?

When we begin to understand how awful sin is we enter into a seemingly bottomless pit of depression. And that's where we would stay were it not for the grace of God in the provision of Jesus Christ. The familiar words of John 3:16 tell us, "*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.*" Julia Johnston used good theology when she wrote about this in the lyrics of a hymn:

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,

Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!

Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,

There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;

Grace, grace, God's grace,  
*Grace that is greater than all our sin!*

God gave Jesus to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. That is generous! And that's what grace

is. It's the ultimate generosity of God!

With the provision of Jesus Christ also comes a promise, the promise of salvation. The promise is found in John 1:12, ". . . *to all who received him . . . he gave the right to become children of God.*" It is also found in the words of Acts 16:31: "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved;*" and, in John 5:24, where Jesus said, ". . . *whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has*

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*eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

That’s generous! God promises his full and absolute pardon of all sin, deletes the death penalty from our record and gives us eternal life. That is the ultimate in generosity. That is the grace of God. But the promise has a condition.

Legal contracts have what is called a “proviso”. It’s an article or clause that introduces a condition. Everything in the contract is legal and binding IF a certain condition is met. Only when the “if” is fulfilled do the benefits of the contract go to the recipient.

There is a proviso in God’s grace. The proviso is faith. Without faith there is no deal. It’s faith or there’s no grace. Faith or there’s no forgiveness. Faith or there’s no salvation. Do you comprehend all of this? Does it make sense to you?

In order to be sure of salvation and live inside-out we must comprehend the gravity of sin and the grace of God. In order to meet this proviso of faith we must believe the facts of the gospel. These facts are written in the New Testament. John 20:31 clearly states, *“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

One of the best summaries of the gospel facts is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: “. . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. . . .” To be sure of salvation you must commit to the truthfulness of these facts.

Some people find that difficult to do. They can’t agree that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he died on the cross for their sins and that God raised him back to life after three days. I’ll admit there have been times in my life when I’ve had my struggles and doubts about these very issues. I look at it at this point in my life and find those things relatively easy to believe. But my answer can’t be your answer. You have to answer to God for yourself.

Committing to the facts is often part of a life-and-death deal. Before having heart surgery you must decide on the facts. You must decide that you need the surgery, that the surgeon has training

(preferably in medical school) and that the surgeon has experience (preferably in heart surgery). Obviously, you must accept and commit yourself to these facts or you won’t go ahead and put your life in someone else’s hands.

It’s even more important with salvation. Before putting your eternal soul in someone else’s hands you must believe that Jesus is who he says he is, that he did what he said he did and that he is able to actually save. You must commit to the facts. Do you?

But it’s not just facts. One must also commit in faith. In Ephesians 2:8 we are told, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. . . .”* Faith is the commitment to place your full trust in someone or something else.

Let’s switch to an analogy for a moment and use something we all understand, money. Let me ask you to do a quick summary of your own net worth. How much do you have? Do you have assets? A few thousand dollars? House? Car? Pension? For the sake of our illustration, assume you have \$50,000. It’s yours to invest any way you choose—and it’s a matter of faith.

One of the first questions you have to resolve is whether or not you have confidence/faith in the United States of America and in the U.S. dollar since most of the investment instruments that are available to us—stocks, bonds, savings, checking and cash—are in U.S. currency. If you have no faith in the dollar you may choose to take your life savings and put it into Albanian leks or Burundi francs or Iranian rials or Mexican pesos.

I’m going to give you some financial advice. If you’re smart you’ll stick with American dollars. But, it’s up to you. It’s your decision. And, it’s a matter of faith. If your faith is right you will come out ahead. If your faith is misplaced, you will lose everything.

A Christian is someone whose faith for salvation is in Jesus Christ alone! It’s up to you. You may choose to invest your faith in Buddha or Mohammed or even in yourself. I’m going to give you some more advice. If I were you I would invest my soul in Jesus Christ and him alone. But that’s your decision and it’s a matter of faith. If your faith is right then you’ve got it made for this

life and forever. If your faith is misplaced you will lose everything forever.

Do you commit? Do you commit to the facts of the gospel? Do you commit in faith to Jesus Christ alone for salvation? If you do then I have a great verse for you and this one is worth memorizing. 1 John 5:13 says, *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*

God says that if you believe, you’ve got it! You’ve got it. You can know for sure that you have eternal life. There’s no need for doubt, no second thoughts or guesses. You can know. All you have to do is comprehend and commit.

In 1973 I traveled throughout Central America without Charleen and I was anxious to get home. My return flight from Honduras was out of Tegucigalpa to Houston where I was to stay overnight before getting the connecting flight home. Early in the trip I learned I could get home a day sooner by flying out of San Pedro Sula in northern Honduras to New Orleans, connecting immediately with a flight home. I talked to a travel agent in San Jose, Costa Rica, who put in a reservation request and told me to confirm it later on. To be sure I sent wires to San Pedro Sula from every place I went where I could find an airline agent, a travel agent or anybody with a teletype or a short wave. I confirmed and reconfirmed maybe eight or ten times.

The day came for the return trip and I was ready to go home. When I finally arrived at the airport in San Pedro Sula the agent told me the plane was full, I had no reservation and the next flight was in a week (except it was full, too!). I said, “Didn’t you get my messages? Didn’t you receive all my confirmations?” She looked at me with Latin disgust for this Yankee and said, “You need to understand that you cannot confirm a reservation you do not have.”

The same goes for salvation. Answer #3 to the question “How can I be sure of my salvation?” is

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to confirm. There are practical ways to confirm your salvation . . . if you have it! But you can’t confirm salvation that you don’t have. Confirmation does not make a reservation for a plane and confirmation does not make salvation for eternity. First you get it by faith and then you confirm it by life.

Is there follow-through to your commitment? Or, did you just think you made a commitment and that was all? If your salvation is genuine it will be followed through by God and you. Philippians 1:6 gives us assurance: “. . . *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion. . . .*” So God follows through. Have you seen that follow-through in your life?

Acts 2:42 tells us that the early Christians followed through: *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* In other words, they stuck with it. They followed through with a commitment to Jesus Christ that was evident in all their behavior that came after.

If you have stuck with your commitment and God has stuck with you that is powerful confirmation of your salvation!

The other confirmation is fruit. In John 15:8 Jesus taught that his disciples will be proved by their fruit. This is not the kind of fruit that grows on trees. It isn’t pears and papayas. It’s spiritual fruit. We read in Galatians 5:22 that the fruit that confirms our salvation is *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* In other words, the good works and the virtues in our lives do not save us but they do confirm our salvation.

Do you see that fruit in your life? Not that you’re perfect; none of us is perfect. But has God brought you far closer to him than you ever could have been if you had not known him? Is there fruit in your life? Are you concerned that the confirmations aren’t all they should be? I sometimes talk to people who act as if there is no fruit in

their lives, yet I can see the fruit growing in their lives. The fruit is there in the words they speak, the things they do and the attitudes they have.

Let me share a personal experience. I was out jogging and thinking about some of the atrocities reported in William Shirer's book *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. I recalled the terrible medical experiments of the Nazi physicians such as dropping people from planes without parachutes, raising or lowering body temperatures to see when a person would die, performing surgery without anesthesia. Then I started wondering what I would do to other people under similar opportunities. I actually thought of some atrocious experiments that could be performed. I was shocked by the realization of my own capacity for sinful human torture. Then I realized I could never do those things because of Jesus Christ in my life. It helped me realize that one of the confirmations of salvation is not just the way I am (which is not good enough) but the way I would be if it were not for salvation!

I do see the fruit in my life. I see the difference God has made. And I thank him for saving me from the horrors of my sinful self.

Do you see that confirmation in your life? Do you follow-through on your faith? Do you grow the fruit?

Assurance of salvation is essential for putting "inside you" together and living "inside-out." I would like for you to have that assurance today.

Let me tell you about when I received that assurance. It was Washington's Birthday and I was a high school student with the day off from school. Charleen and I were going together and we had plans for that day which were pre-empted by her parents. I was home alone and I was angry and upset. Interestingly, God used that to trigger some serious introspection which led to the whole question of my own salvation and relationship to Jesus Christ. I got down on my knees in my bedroom and committed myself to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord once and for all. I remember the day. I remember the place. I have experienced confirmation since that day.

Do you need that same assurance? In the words of 1 John 5:13, "*I (say) these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*" I invite you to claim that assurance of salvation right now!

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