

What Is Salvation?

by J.K. McKee

Of all the doctrines and teachings of our faith, one remains the most critical: the doctrine of salvation. If a person does not get this right, then he or she has no chance of being in God's Kingdom. The written Word of God is clear that a person who does not come to faith in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), repent of his or her sins, and is spiritually regenerated will suffer the reality of eternal punishment.

We will examine the critical areas of the salvation message, some of which are avoided, knowingly or unknowingly, by various Bible teachers today. The doctrine of salvation is very important, but it unfortunately often remains one of the least discussed within our faith today. It is most important, because it affects how we live today and has *eternal* consequences for the hereafter.

The doctrine of salvation is one of the most easy, but one of the most difficult concepts for some to understand. In Mark 10:13-15, Yeshua tells us that we are to come to Him like a child, innocent and humble, and if we do not have this attitude then we may not enter into eternity with Him:

“And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Yeshua saw this, He was indignant and said to them, ‘Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*’” (Mark 10:13-15).

Why a Person Must Be “Saved”

Critical to understanding the doctrine of salvation is knowing *why* a person needs to be “saved.” One must be able to grasp that Messiah Yeshua came to save us from two things: our sin and eternal punishment:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Messiah Yeshua our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

Although there are numerous passages in Scripture which both define sin and eternal punishment, Romans 6:23 is to the point. It tells us that the consequence of sin is death, properly and Hebraically understood to be separation from God. Sin is defined by 1 John 3:4 as being transgression or disobedience of God's Law or the Torah. Every person on Planet Earth is guilty of transgressing God's commandments, either directly or indirectly. Consider the fact that although none of us may have actually broken the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not commit murder” (Exodus 20:13), by committing manslaughter—Yeshua tells us that we have still broken it:

“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell” (Matthew 5:21-22).¹

It is doubtful that you have ever committed physical murder. However, we have all no doubt called a person a “fool” or an “idiot” or “worthless.” According to the Lord, if we have called someone worthless or a fool, then we are guilty of breaking the Sixth Commandment and should receive capital punishment. Although this is only one example, there are no doubt other commandments which we have broken in a similar manner. Everyone is guilty of transgressing God’s commandments. The Bible speaks to our common sinfulness:

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Psalm 14:1-3).

“[A]s it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE”” (Romans 3:10).

The Torah or Law of Moses tells us that sin can only be atoned for through the sacrifice of animals. Specifically, we know that the high priest was responsible for putting the blood of a blameless lamb on the mercy seat in the ancient Holy of Holies on every *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) that would cover Israel’s sin for the year.

Eventually, Israel would receive the promised Messiah and Deliverer. God sent His Son, Yeshua, to atone for the sin of humanity. Consequently, Yeshua is referred to as being the Lamb of God, so we know that He is the *only* One through which salvation can be attained (John 1:29; 1:36).

Many who claim Yeshua as Lord know that salvation comes only through Him. But what if people refuse salvation? What fate awaits them?

“These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).

The words of Yeshua are very to the point. He tells us that those who do not have faith in Him as the Messiah “will go away into eternal punishment.” The Book of Revelation further tells us that at the Second Resurrection, the damned will received a “glorified” body (just as those in the First Resurrection) prior to experiencing their fate in the Lake of Fire. Consider what happens to the Beast and the false prophet following the end of the Tribulation period. They are cast directly into the Lake of Fire and do not appear before the Great White Throne judgment:

“And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who

worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone...And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 19:20; 20:10).

The same is the fate that awaits those who reject Yeshua the Messiah as Savior. The Lake of Fire is the destiny that awaits those who do not come to faith in Yeshua. The condemned will be judged by their works (Revelation 20:12) and then punished accordingly. Because these people did not receive salvation of God, rejecting Him, they will suffer eternal damnation. The condemned will approach the Great White Throne and be judged according to their works and be thrown into this terrifying place. If one does not come to saving faith in Yeshua the Messiah, there is absolutely no hope for oneself.

How Does a Person Become “Saved”?

How a person comes to faith in Yeshua is very critical to understand. Mark 1:15 probably summarizes it best: “‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (NIV).

Mark 1:15 tells us to “repent ye, and believe the gospel” (KJV). So what is repentance, and what is the gospel?

Specifically, the word “gospel” is synonymous with “good news.” The gospel is the good news of salvation in Yeshua the Messiah and that we can all be reconciled with God, experiencing the great blessings He has for us now and into eternity. Many Believers today know that believing in Yeshua the Messiah, knowing that He was crucified for the sin of all mankind, that He performed miracles, and that He will come again is important. Indeed, many believe in the “good news.” But, the word “repent” stands out very clearly and we must take notice.

The Apostle Paul writes, “if you confess with your mouth Yeshua *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED’” (Romans 10:9-11). Many will only quote Romans 10:9, saying that “that if you confess with your mouth Yeshua *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” However, it is important to note that Satan and demonic principalities *also believe* in God. James testifies, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder” (James 2:19).

We are called to do more than just acknowledge the historical existence of Yeshua to be saved. Paul wrote the Philippians that he wanted to “know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). Paul wanted to experience everything that Yeshua experienced. All of the sentient beings that have ever existed will at some time or another recognize Yeshua the Messiah as Master of Creation. Is salvation simply acknowledging the historical existence of the Messiah and His deeds? No. If that is the case, then demons can be saved. Romans 10:10 tells us, “for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in

salvation.” One needs to *confess sin* to be redeemed. But what is confession, and what is repentance? Consider these additional words from Paul:

“For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:8-10).

The Apostle Paul indicates that his previous writing to the Corinthians caused them deep sorrow, for which he did not apologize. He writes, “the sorrow according to *the will of* God produces repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation.” Confession and repentance are directly related. The Greek noun translated as “repentance” in these passages is *metanoia* (metanoia), meaning “*repentance, turning about, conversion*” (BDAG),² specifically “a change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life” (Thayer).³ *Metanoia* directly means a change of one’s decisions and the desire to amend one’s lifestyle, as one must consciously choose to depart from sin. Yet we should know that our faith is not just a “mind thing”—as anyone can come to a “mental ascent” of Yeshua, acknowledging the existence and historical life of the Messiah, or decide that he or she will “not sin” or “start doing good things” or even “keep God’s laws.” Rather, repentance is a matter of the heart, one’s innermost being.

The Prophet Isaiah declares, “For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, ‘In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.’ But you were not willing” (Isaiah 30:15). The Hebrew term for “repentance” is *shuvab* (חָבַב), meaning, “turning back” (HALOT),⁴ but also defined as “retirement, withdrawal” (BDB).⁵ Repentance is not only deciding that one will depart from sin; it is complete withdrawal from it.

Repentance, in the technical sense, means a *turning away* from sin. However, equally important is confession of sin. The Greek verb *homologeō* (ὁμολογέω) is used for “confessing” in Romans 10:10, and means “to admit or declare one’s self guilty of what one is accused of” (Thayer).⁶ Confession means an acknowledgement, be it of sin or a proclamation of faith. However, in our Western, Americandominated world many believe that if they simply acknowledge—perhaps better stated as *weakly admit*—that they “are sinners” and mentally decide that they will quit sinning, that they will be saved and spend eternity with the Lord. Let us consider Romans 10:10 once again:

“For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”

The “heart” is not just one’s physical heart or one’s mind. As Yeshua says regarding the First Commandment: “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38). This is a reaffirmation of Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

One's *entire being* must be involved in the salvation process. 2 Corinthians 7:10 tells us, "the sorrow that is according to *the will of God* produces a repentance without regret," or in other words: godly sorrow (remorse) enables us to turn from sin. But what is godly sorrow? Is it simply being sorry for transgression of the Torah (Law)? Or are there other *deep elements* involved? Consider for a moment the English definitions of repentance and confession. Repentance means "remorse or contrition for past conduct of sin."

Confession is defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary* as "an act of confessing; acknowledgement; avowal; admission," "that which is confessed," "a formal declaration of guilt," and "The disclosure of sins to a priest for absolution."

The one definition of confession that is quite interesting is that of "disclosure of sins to a priest for absolution." In the modern sense, this of course is referring to the Roman Catholic practice of confessing sins to a priest, who would then take them to God the Father. We know this practice is non-Biblical. However, we must all go through *the High Priest, Yeshua the Messiah*, to be saved.

In feeling *deep remorse* for our sins, we must take that sin to the sacrifice of the Messiah who is in constant intercession for us at the right hand of God the Father (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 3:1; 4:14). Yeshua is our High Priest. It is only through Him that one can be saved and delivered from sin and separation from God.

There is a key parallel between the Levitical high priest and our High Priest, Yeshua. When a person went to take a sacrifice to the Tabernacle or Temple to atone for his sin, he would have to *specifically* confess his sin—to the best of his ability—to the priest before his sacrifice would be accepted. The priest would then take the sacrifice before God. And, these confessions could only be made for the sins of omission, as the Torah has no specified sacrifice for *intentional sin*. That is why Yeshua had to come and die for us.

In a similar manner, do Believers need to specifically confess sin when receiving God's free gift of salvation? Yeshua, our Priest, currently mediates between us and God the Father. Many teach that all you need to do is "tell God you're a sinner and ask Him to forgive you of your sins" or something of the like. This is true—to a certain extent. Although it is no longer necessary to sacrifice animals for one's atonement, does the principle of confessing of one's sins still apply? I believe that it does in most cases. Salvation is easy, but it is difficult. In turning or repenting of one's sins, *one must confess*. The Word of God is undeniably true in this case:

"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10).

In Philippians 2:12, the Apostle Paul says to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” He is clearly stating that salvation is not something to be taken lightly and he implies that we are to be in a consistent state of evaluating our spiritual condition. Many who claim Messiah Yeshua as Lord do not take their faith seriously. They may believe that a simple “sinner’s prayer” saved them. But, salvation comes from heart felt confession and repentance. There is no specified “sinner’s prayer” in Scripture. The Lord issues warnings about how we must strive to reach His Kingdom:

“And someone said to Him, ‘Lord, are there *just* a few who are being saved?’ And He said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, “Lord, open up to us!” then He will answer and say to you, “I do not know where you are from.” Then you will begin to say, “We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets”; and He will say, “I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.” In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out” (Luke 13:23-28).

Yeshua tells us that many will seek to enter into God’s Kingdom, but that you have to “Strive to enter by the narrow door.” Is this an indication that salvation comes by simply admitting that you are a sinner and deciding in your mind not to sin? No. It is an indication that there will be many who seek salvation and *think* they have it, but do not. We must struggle with difficulty and trials and tribulations through our walk of faith. The Believer’s life is not an easy one. The emphasis of true heart felt confession and repentance is paramount. We are to *desperately strive* to be saved. This is the essence of the *Shema* that declares love and total devotion to God—the key elements of a proper relationship with Him:

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

The *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 tells us what the greatest commandment is as repeated by Yeshua (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:29-30), as we are to make the Lord first in our lives and to love Him. This cannot be overstated. True salvation must be evidenced by fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) and good works (James 2:20). The first fruit mentioned in Galatians 5:22 is love, a direct mirror of the greatest commandment restated by Yeshua and of the second greatest commandment (Leviticus 19:17-18) restated by Him in Matthew 22:39-40 and Mark 12:29-31. As the Apostle Paul also says,

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

We are to love one another so much that we are *willing to die* for other Believers, just as Yeshua died for us:

“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends...You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that*

your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you” (John 15:13, 17).

Salvation comes by Biblical heart felt confession and repentance, or a turning away from sin. Salvation is evidenced by fruit—the foremost of which is Divine supernatural love as defined by John 15:13, 1 Corinthians 13:1-7, Galatians 5:22, and numerous other references throughout the Bible. If these fruit are truly evident in our lives, we can know have been truly freed from the curse of sin by the sacrifice of the Messiah. In John 13:35, Yeshua tells us “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

True salvation will be evidenced by Divine, self-sacrificing love.

No person on Planet Earth deserves eternal life (communion with God) or the chance to spend eternity with Yeshua. The aspects of salvation I have tried to emphasize are repentance or turning from sin, and confession: true, remorseful, proclamation of sins committed. 1 John 3:4 tells us that transgression of God’s Law is sin. As humans, we cannot hope to perfectly observe God’s commandments and it is only by His grace that we are not eternally condemned. Paul summarizes all of these critical concepts:

“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Yeshua the Messiah our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7).

If you are uncertain where your eternal destiny lies, then I suggest you reevaluate your standing with God. Do you have the blood covering of the Lamb? Have you truly turned from your sin? Is the Holy Spirit truly resident inside you? Do you have unconditional love for your brethren? Did you come to faith as someone who realized that he or she was truly worthless in the eyes of a holy and righteous God—or someone who simply needed “fire insurance”? Philippians 2:12 is very clear about how we should deal with our standing before the Almighty. The Apostle Paul instructs us, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” If you do not get salvation right, you will have to suffer eternal consequences.

What Did Yeshua Mean When He Said “Born Again”?

“Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?’ Yeshua answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, “You must be born again”’” (John 3:3-7). In John 3:3-7, Nicodemus asks Yeshua how he can “see the kingdom of God.” Yeshua responds and tells him “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He further says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” 1 Peter 1:22-23 also elaborates on what “being born again” is:

“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.”

In this passage the Apostle Peter writes new Believers (1 Peter 2:2), telling them that they have been *born again* or spiritually regenerated. The love which he is speaking of is Divine *agapē* love. If you have truly come to faith in Yeshua the Messiah then you have been born again. You have been changed and given a new heart, and have the Holy Spirit inside of you. The Apostle Paul writes, “Therefore if anyone is in Messiah, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). If you have truly come before a holy God with a remorseful repentance and confession or proclamation of sin and have the Holy Spirit resident inside you, then you are a new creation.

Conclusion

We have just briefly discussed the doctrine of salvation. The issues of confession, repentance, and being born again are very important to one’s relationship with God. No one can overemphasize how one comes to saving faith. If you are not sure about your eternal destiny or whether have truly confessed your sin before God via His High Priest, Yeshua the Messiah, then I suggest that you plan to spend some time in spiritual reflection before the Lord. If you have unconfessed sin in your life, *confess and turn from it*. Get yourself right with God, and truly be working out your salvation with fear and trembling!

¹ Cf. Genesis 9:6; Exodus 21:12; Leviticus 24:17; Matthew 5:21; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 13:9; James 2:11.

² Fredrick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 640.

³ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 406.

⁴ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:1435.

⁵ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 1000.

⁶ *Thayer*, 446.

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