

Salvation

Part 2 - Why is it that only Jesus can save us, and how, exactly, does he do it?

“For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, **God did by sending his Son** in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering,” **Romans 8:3**.

Only Jesus can save us from sin. It doesn't matter how much “I delight in God's law,” **Romans 7:22**, because, **verse 23**, there's “another law” at work “waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin.” We're prisoners alright, **verse 5**, because we're totally “controlled by the sinful nature” – which is actually made worse by knowing God's law because that's when “sin springs to life,” **verse 9**, and all kinds of “sinful passions” and “covetous desires” are aroused in us, **verses 5, 8** – the law, therefore, doesn't help us at all.

How on earth did we end up in this awful state, then?

“Through **disobedience**,” **Romans 5:19**, the disobedience “of the one man,” Adam. Because of him “Sin entered the world, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned,” **verse 12**.

Disobedience opened the door to sin, as we see in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were given a simple command by God, they disobeyed it and that's when sin took control. And look what it did to Cain next in **Genesis 4:3**. He knew that “some of the fruits of the soil” wasn't right for an offering to the Lord, **verses 4-5**, but he did it anyway. And when God didn't “look with favour” on his offering, Cain got angry, to which God said in **verses 6-7**, “Why are you angry? **If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not what is right** sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

God makes a direct connection between disobedience and sin. Disobey God's will and sin immediately jumps in and takes control. And all it took was ONE ACT of disobedience by one man for it to happen. Sin was now loose in the human mind, infecting everyone from then on with its sinful passions and covetous desires, and once loose there was nothing that could stop it. It was just like a killer virus escaping from a laboratory; once out, there was no getting it back. And what a deadly disease it was too, because humanity as a whole was so badly infected by the time of the Flood that “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time,” **Genesis 6:5**.

Things haven't improved since the Flood either. Humanity as a whole, still infected by the law of sin and death, constantly disobeys God, and that's thrown the doors wide open to "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient," **Ephesians 2:2**. That's what threw the doors open to the Devil in the Garden of Eden, too. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the Devil could now work directly in their minds perverting good into evil.

Scripture puts the blame for all human tragedy and misery fairly and squarely on our disobedience to God. "Let no man deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient," **Ephesians 5:6**. And what "things" did Paul mean? "Whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry – because of these the wrath of God is coming," **Colossians 3:5-6**.

Paul describes our disobedience as "idolatry," because at heart and core we're idolizing our own desires, not God's. That's the root of our problem, illustrated so perfectly again in the Garden of Eden, where Eve was far more interested in the forbidden fruit "looking good to eat" and "making her wise" than she was in God's command not to eat it (Genesis 3:6). Quoting Athanasius in his book 'Against the Heathen' – humanity "fell into lust of themselves, preferring what was their own to the contemplation of what belonged to God."

Paul would have agreed with Athanasius, as we see in his admonition, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things," **Colossians 3:2**. Even Christians needed a reminder as to what got humanity into trouble in the first place and what still plagues us all today: We are SELF-obsessed – with self-image, self-gratification, self-improvement, self-advancement, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-help, self-pity, self-indulgence (think Christmas!) or self-denial. And we live in a culture addicted to being self-assertive, self-assured, self-reliant, self-opinionated, self-sufficient, self-willed, self-righteous, self-seeking and self-satisfied. We are utterly SELF-centred. The idea of thinking about "things above," or "contemplating what belongs to God" and what God wants, is excused away and trampled in the headlong rush to advance and pamper self.

"What's wrong with that, though," someone's bound to ask, "we're human aren't we, so how can we not think about ourselves?" But to think only of ourselves creates a problem – the desperate fear of having all that we work for to satisfy and promote ourselves being ripped away in death. We feel it slipping away as we get older and feebler. We don't make quite the impression we used to make, we don't have the energy to keep up like we used to, and the future's hardly anything to look forward to as our abilities and health deteriorate still further. Earthly things, we begin to realize, are short-lived. And the gods we've created to bring us happiness and freedom from anxiety and despair aren't working so well anymore. In fact, they're highly corrosive, because we realize they've eaten up years of our lives on empty pursuits, none of which extend our lives one second beyond death.

So what creates this obsession with self in the first place? What made humans from the very beginning choose self instead of God? What set Eve's mind on what she wanted above what God wanted? Adam and Eve were created "good," so there couldn't have been anything bad that caused them to do what they did, surely?

No, they weren't bad, but they weren't complete. To be fully made in God's image, they needed - as we all do - to **"become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ," Ephesians 4:13**. At that point in their lives they were spiritual infants, who had not yet **"in all things grown up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ," verse 15**. They didn't instantly start off like Christ, but they could grow into him, gradually **"being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory"** - BUT, take note, this growing **"comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit," 2 Corinthians 3:18**.

Ah, so that's where the problem lies. We don't have it in us naturally to grow into Christ's likeness. We need SPIRIT help from Christ himself for that, and no wonder - Christ is Spirit so for us to be made into his likeness it has to come from a Spirit source. *With* that Spirit help we can grow up and **"no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming," Ephesians 4:14**, but *until* that Spirit help "comes from the Lord" we remain as infants spiritually, and very much open to being taken in by deceitful scheming.

It's the vital lesson we learn from Adam and Eve's experience. They were easily taken in by the serpent's deceitful scheming, because they didn't have the **"Spirit"** yet that would enable them to love and obey the Father in the same way Jesus did, **Romans 8:15**. But that's God's great goal for us: **"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ," Ephesians 1:5**. Because of Christ we can share the same Spirit of sonship he does, so we can mature into loving and obedient sons of God just like him.

And how does that process of maturing begin? With a revealing test. Would Adam and Eve honour their Creator by obeying the command not to eat the forbidden fruit? They failed miserably, but it revealed the need. They needed the same Spirit of sonship that Jesus had. That was the key to being able to obey, which we see in what happened to Jesus when he too was tested by the serpent. Three times the Devil tried to get Jesus to do things the Father would not have approved of (Matthew 4:1-10), but in all three cases Jesus put his Father's will first.

Right off the bat, then, in both Jesus' ministry and the Garden of Eden, the first test was obedience to the Father's will. It was no contest for Jesus, but with Adam and Eve it was a different story because they had to learn, as we all do, that the only way our salvation happens, of one day being in the same loving, obedient relationship with God that Jesus has, is by HIS Spirit of sonship in us.

Because look what that Spirit of sonship did in him, as we see in:

- 1) **Hebrews 10:5, 7** "When Christ came into the world, he said... 'I have come to do your will, O God.'" And again in **verse 9** "Here I am, I have come to do your will."
- 2) **John 17:26** "I have declared your name and will declare it."
- 3) **Matthew 26:39** "Yet not as I will but as you will."
- 4) **John 15:15** "Everything I have learned of my Father, I have made known to you."

In Jesus' life his Father came first in everything, never himself. Never, therefore, did he disobey God, so sin never got a look in. Here, then, was the secret to the perfect human life: it was Jesus' Spirit of sonship. That's what lay at the heart and core of his obedience, and it's through him giving US that same Spirit that lies at the heart and core of our becoming loving and obedient sons of the Father, too.

We've got a problem, though. Adam and Eve had already disobeyed so sin was out of the bag and infecting every human born. The entire human race was now under the total control of the law of sin and death. How on earth, then, could God bridge the great gulf between adopting us as his sons and sin having already destroyed us? And how could God *justify* bridging the gulf when we'd already made our decision to reject him? He couldn't go back on his word: Disobey and you die, he said.

Was that what the law was for, then, to bridge the gulf? Would obedience make up for our disobedience? No, "the law was powerless in that it was weakened by the sinful nature," **Romans 8:3**. Sin is so strong that even the law can't contain it. But God had the solution: what the law couldn't do "God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering."

But how would that work? Very effectively (and very fairly too), "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous," **Romans 5:19**. The key to solving the dilemma was CHRIST's obedience, not ours. He came in our likeness but never sinned, "CONSEQUENTLY, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men," **verse 18**.

ONE ACT of disobedience condemned us all to sin and death, but ONE ACT of righteousness - Jesus' life of loving obedience to his Father - fulfilled the "righteous requirements of the law" on our behalf, **Romans 8:4**. They were "fully met in us" BY CHRIST. What we had been utterly unable to do in our spiritual infancy, God did in his Son, who willingly gave his life as a "sin offering" and "condemned sin in sinful man," **verse 3**, by not only taking the burden of all our sins on himself, but also living a perfect life of loving obedience to his Father on our behalf.

Jesus did what we couldn't do. He took our sin to the cross and killed its power and control over us, and lived the life of perfect and loving obedience to the Father that we couldn't live. His life could now become our life so that never again do we have to "live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit," **verse 4**.

In this way God could justify saving sinners, bridge the gulf and restore us back into relationship with him, because we could now live the likeness of his Son in the same Spirit of sonship, and mature into the same perfect sons as his own beloved Son.

But that's what he'd sent his Son for, "because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death," **verse 2**. Through Jesus came the "law of the Spirit of life" – which was? The Spirit of sonship in Jesus that he always lived by, that made him willingly and naturally fulfill his Father's will. And through Jesus that Spirit is now ours. And because it's ours we are no longer under the control of the sinful nature in us but under the control of the Spirit. Result? We too now can live a life of perfect and loving obedience to the Father, and in so doing keep sin at bay.

The problem of our disobedience has been resolved! And not only past disobedience but any future disobedience as well, because we can now "live in accordance with the Spirit" and "have our minds set on what the Spirit desires," **verse 5**. What the Spirit desires, we desire, because "those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God," **verse 14**, and as such we have the same "Spirit of sonship" that Jesus had, so that "by him we (can also) cry, 'Abba, Father,'" **verse 15**.

At last the spiritual growth and maturity we lacked in the Garden of Eden can now begin, and it truly is *spiritual* growth because it's directly caused by the Spirit. Where that growth is directed is in loving obedience to the Father, because that's what prevents us from sinning. "By the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body," **verse 13**, a true and tangible sign of a growing, maturing child of God, the obvious fruits of which are the desire and ability to "submit to God's law," and "peace" in our relationship with God, rather than "hostility" and resistance, **verses 6-7**.

What we also experience is a new "spirit," because "if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness," **verse 10**. Sin killed us off and there's no retrieving what's dead, but we've been given a new life, and this new life is spiritual because it's the righteousness of Jesus Christ that's now being fully matured in us. And since we are now spiritual because of him living his life in us, and that part of us is now alive and functioning, two wonderful things happen:

- 1) We don't have "a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear," **verse 15**. No longer do we have the desperate fear of our lives being wasted, or the anxiety that our lives are slipping away with nothing being accomplished. The body may not be accomplishing much but that's not where the action is anyway, it's in Jesus maturing us spiritually into wonderful children of God, and -

- 2) **“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children,” verse 16.** We can see and sense what’s happening to us, that ever so gradually we’re being matured into God’s adopted sons. The Spirit makes that relationship real. We know it’s true. So it’s just as Jesus said, that **“a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks,” John 4:23.** God is a Spirit so he seeks a spiritual relationship with us, which he provides for us by the Spirit. The result is Spirit-filled sons, full to the brim with the fullness of Christ, because that’s the relationship our Father created us for. The knowledge of good and evil couldn’t do that for us, neither could the law. But what they couldn’t do, the Father did by sending his Son.

Sending his Son accomplished 2 things for us (the two of which together summarize these first two sermons on salvation):

- 1) First, it awakens in our minds the awfulness and evil of sin. We recognize sin for what it is, how utterly selfish it is in its desire to create a gulf between us and God, making us resist God and rebel against him, to the point we realize there’s nothing good in that sinful nature at all. It is utterly sinful through and through, wishing only to destroy us (sermon No.1).
- 2) Second, it awakens in our minds an overwhelming sense of the love of God. We recognize God for who he is, how utterly unselfish he is in his desire to bridge the gulf between us, enabling us to **“participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires,” 2 Peter 1:4,** to the point we realize he has only good intentions in his nature. He is utterly loving through and through, wishing only **“life and peace”** for us, **Romans 8:6.**

This is salvation.