

Transcript 134

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. As you know, we're a ministry that answers people's Bible questions and that opens us up to all kinds of questions. I mean truly in 20 years hundreds of thousands of questions, millions of views on our articles. We've been asked everything about everything, although we still get surprised occasionally with a new question, never been asked before, but our favorite questions to answer are always questions related to salvation. We deal with questions on obscure topics quite a bit. The question people want to debate and argue about this, it's interesting, it's fascinating, but in the grand scheme of things, in light of eternity really not that important. When people ask us questions about how can I be saved? How can I better understand the salvation that God is provided to Christ? Those are truly our favorite questions to answer.

Shea Houdmann

I remember the very first time someone asked, I think was phrased, how can I know for sure I go to heaven when I die? I truly brought my wife into the room, said Melissa, is it possible for someone to get saved on the Internet? Because at the time we had envisioned Got Questions as primarily being a discipleship focused ministry. But since that moment and on, we've realized that you know, people truly are coming to faith in Christ online. And we've heard from hundreds of people who have God has used GotQuestions.org and also other people have planted seeds in their lives and so forth to bring them to faith. And so again, answering questions about salvation. It's thrilling. It's exciting. It can be challenging, but it's our favorite question answers.

Shea Houdmann

So joining me today is Kevin. Kevin is the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries. And Jeff, he is the administrator of bibleref.com. So gentlemen welcome. So today we're going to be discussing the different tenses of salvation. And allow me to explain briefly, in the Bible, New Testament, especially it talks about salvation in three different tenses. The first you are saved or you have been saved. When we transition from being unsaved to saved, that is something that's happened in the past. Then we are also being saved. There's a present tense to it. Something that it's an ongoing salvation. And then there's other Bible verses that refer to you will be saved referring to our ultimate salvation glorification when we pass into eternity, receive our glorified bodies, and we are saved entirely. So those are the three tenses.

Shea Houdmann

You can do it from a perspective of sanctification, there's positional, where we're in God's sight we are holy. Progressive sanctification, where we are progressively being made more holy and there's ultimate sanctification when we'll be free from sin. You can talk about sin in the sense we're saved from the penalty of sin. We're being saved from the power of sin, and we're being saved from the very presence of sin. So several different ways to look at this, but let's jump in. Each of us are going to cover one of the main tenses and obviously I'm talk about it back and forth. So Kevin, why don't you start us off? From what does the Bible say about salvation in the past tense?

Kevin Stone

I'd be glad to talk about that and Shea and Jeff what a privilege it is to be talking about the salvation that's available in Jesus Christ today. No greater topic than this, as as you were alluding to Shea, yeah, our salvation, past, present, future tenses in Scripture were justified. We're saved in the past when we confessed Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and we believed. We had, we had faith in Jesus and his sacrifice. We then we'll move on to the present tense of our salvation, and that involves our sanctification, and that's a process that we go through and then glorification, in the future. That's the future that we'll be looking at here in just a minute.

Kevin Stone

But I want to focus on we are saved in the past. There was an act of justification that took place at the moment that we exercised faith in Christ. And our salvation actually goes back further than that in God's plan because from eternity past God had his plan to send his son into the world to take on human flesh, the incarnation, and to become one of us. And so at a particular point in in space and time, the son of God became human. He took on human flesh. He added the human nature to his divine nature and he he lived and walked among us. We beheld his glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth, and that all happened at a point in time. And then Jesus died on the cross as our substitute. He took our penalty for sin upon himself on that cross. He died. He was buried. He rose again then on the third day, ascended to heaven. And now God calls on everyone to respond to that provision, that sacrifice in faith and Scripture says we are justified by faith. To be justified is to be declared righteous. I think on our website we have formally defined justification as this, an act of God whereby he pronounces a Sinner to be righteous because of that sinner's faith in Christ. So Jesus paid for our sin in the past when we trust him for salvation, we are forgiven and we are justified. We are declared to be righteous before God and that is a once for all transaction that happened at a particular point in the past for those who are saved.

Kevin Stone

Most Christians can look back to a particular time in their lives where they came to Christ in faith, and so a person who's been justified has been saved and that takes care of the guilt problem that we had before God. He has declared us to be not guilty. He has declared us to be righteous in his eyes. Romans 3 verse four brings out this beautiful truth that all are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. So grace is a free gift and salvation is by grace we are justified. We are declared righteous because of Jesus Christ and what he did for us and we have been declared righteous by God's grace. Christ has redeemed us. Romans 5 and verse one, therefore, since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So there's been a reconciliation that has happened because of our justification at that point in time when we exercised faith in Christ.

Kevin Stone

Scripture is very clear that this happened because of the sacrifice of Christ. This is Romans 5 verse 9 speaks of having now been justified by his blood. It was the death of Christ that provided for our justification, our salvation. And sometimes we don't feel very saved. We don't feel like we're very forgiven because, you know, we still mess up. We still sin. Well Romans 8 verse 33 gives us this assurance, who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. So our justification, our salvation is not dependent on how we feel. Or how often we mess up. Our justification is based on God's

finished work through Christ on the cross. It is God who justifies. And so God says that in Christ we are righteous as we exercise faith in him we've been declared righteous. And so if God says it, we don't have any other choice but to believe it. We received this by faith and salvation in this sense is a done deal, we are justified past tense by faith in Christ, and we now have a righteous standing, our position in Christ is one of standing in righteousness. And praise the Lord for this wonderful truth.

Jeff Laird

It is a good truth. That brings us to the idea that sometimes the more complicated questions in scripture are the ones that are involved with the most important topics in salvation being one of them. So when we talk about salvation as a past tense issue, most people can understand that. And there's not a tremendous amount of controversy behind that because we have verses like Ephesians Chapter 2, which makes a couple references to by grace you have been saved. You know you've been saved through faith. This is not you. It's the gift of God. It could be a little more complicated when we start talking about salvation in that present tense, because now we're raising questions of does that mean that this is something that's ongoing but not finished? Does that mean that it's something that I'm still participating in? And all those contexts are important. When we put them all together, we see that the salvation references that we have in Scripture that are in the present tense are really talking about that sense of sanctification. That's where we're being saved from that power of sin. That influence of sin in our lives.

Jeff Laird

We have Romans 8:29 talks about the the ones that God foreknew or pre destined to be conformed to the image of his son. We have Galatians talks about anguish of childbirth in Christ, so there's this sense that once we have gotten what we would call positional sanctification, that we've been rescued from the ultimate eternal penalty, that there's now a process that God is using in us that we do have to participate in, that we go through. And that's the present tense of salvation. We have Ephesians 1:14 talks about how God chose us before the foundation of the world. Why? So we should be holy and blameless before him. And as it's been stated, we don't always feel that way because we're still here and we're still limited and we still have those flaws. But that is the process that we go through in the present tense of salvation. We have Ephesians 2:10 talks about we are his workmanship, created for good works prepared beforehand that we should walk in him.

Jeff Laird

And I think it's important that we see that there are verbs in there that implies some ongoing action, workmanship. Walk with him. The the analogy of a Potter is useful because those are, those are verbs and words that imply a process. So when you when you flip a switch, though, the word flip involves a one time, immediate instant on and off sort of action. But then we have words like mold and walk and carve and grow that involve a process. So we're saved in the past. In that sense that we are once and forever rescued from that eternal penalty. We are permanently changed in the way that we interact with God. But then in the present tense we're not doing something that establishes our salvation. We're not doing something that confirms it in the sense that we are making it real salvation, not just sort of salvation or partial salvation. It's the salvation that is I'm being pulled away from all those things in the world that separate me from Christ and I am moving towards what he wants me to be.

Jeff Laird

Now I'm not going to fully attain all of those things until eternity. So that's a process that's literally lifelong, ongoing forever and moving on. So that's where the present tense aspect of salvation is sometimes difficult for people to wrap their heads around. Scripture does not say, and the context shows that we do not consistently work for the sake of being saved from an eternal doom. What it says is that once we have been saved, we now have access to God's power in order to be freed from sin and to grow more like him. And that's really what the present tense of salvation is meant to imply.

Shea Houdmann

That, Jeff, you're exactly right in that if I were to look at the type of questions we receive, most of the confusion over salvation is about the present tense. People can generally understand having been saved the moment when we trust in Christ by grace through faith. And are saved, transformed our new creation to something that happened in the past. And what I'm going to talk about in a moment about the future tense of salvation. Understand that when we die, or when we are taken into heaven, depending on your view of eschatology, something different will happen. There's some aspect of salvation that is still in the future. What we're going to experience in heaven is different than what we're experiencing now. It's the it's the present tense that where the most difficulty is, and I'm sure we'll probably spend a lot of our time once I get this future tense out of the way, going through that but future tense, the terms theological terms you'll hear used most often will be glorification and ultimate sanctification. Where there's lots of verses that talk about when you arrive in heaven. If you want to get a good picture of having Revelation chapters 21 and 22 give us a glimpse. And the amazing vision that God gave the apostle John. That describes a world that's very different than what we're experiencing now, and what we will experience then is different in terms of who we will be, what we will be like. First Corinthians 15 that talks about the difference between our current bodies and the glorified bodies.

Shea Houdmann

But probably my two favorite verses in Scripture that refer to glorification would be First John 3:2, which reads, beloved, we are God's children now. And what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is. This describes the moment where we will pass into eternity. We will see Christ and we will be transformed. We will be free from the presence of sin, we will have a glorified body never subject to death or decay. We will be completely free from forever the presence of sin. And all that starts when we see Christ in glory. Then also in Philippians chapter 3, verses 20 and 21, which reads that our citizenship is in heaven and from what we await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Shea Houdmann

So both these talk about things that have not yet happened. There's some things that are in the future aspects of our salvation when our salvation is perfected, when it is made complete. The provision of it is perfect and complete already, but the reality of it in our existence awaits the future glorification. This is the blessed hope. This is the the goal of our salvation. This is ultimately what Christ died for us for to bring us to the point where we could spend eternity with him, be completely free from sin. So this is the future tense of salvation whenever you hear or read passages that talk about you will be saved or these things will happen, or your sanctification will be complete, all pointing to the reality that's already

guaranteed because of the past tense salvation. But we are not yet fully experiencing them because they await the future.

Kevin Stone

And what an experience that's going to be Shea, just thinking about the the fact that we will be saved from the presence of sin in the future. I was it goes along with a Bible study that I was prepping for a few days back, and in that study I was I was taking a look at the comparisons between Eden, the Innocence and the the Beauty and the perfection of the Garden of Eden and our existence there and comparing that with what we see in Revelation 21 and 22 with the new heavens and the new earth. And there are a lot of things are comparable there, as God restores paradise in a certain sense. But there's one big contrast there, and that is in Eden there was a possibility for temptation and a fall, but in the new heavens and the new Earth that is completely gone. There is no possibility of temptation or another fall. We have been. It's our state of glorification. And it's the the way God will move things forward throughout all eternity. The tempter is gone, temptation is gone, and all sin has been completely done away with, and we will be confirmed in the holiness that we have from Christ.

Shea Houdmann

Great point Kevin, and again the future tense of salvation is was supposed to give us the most hope. It's a reminder this world is not our home. That the momentary trials we're experiencing in this life will eventually be put to an end and will be in a place where perfect fellowship with God through Christ, never having to experience the degradation of sin again.

Shea Houdmann

But let's jump into maybe some of the top questions that we receive. And to me it seems like the most common question related to salvation in light of our conversation today is people who confuse the present tense, the ongoing nature of salvation with the past tense. They want to base their salvation on what they are experiencing presently, not on the objective fact that Christ died for their sins, and they've trusted in them. So Jeff, maybe you can address what are some of the common questions you see that are related to this and maybe what's the solution, how can we get people to while not denying the importance of progressive sanctification of growing closer to Christ, becoming more like him, but not basing our salvation on what we are day-to-day lives rather than basing it on the finished work of Christ.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, there's a lot of confusion. A lot of debates sometimes about what exactly is the relationship between legitimate salvation and signs in a person's life things like their lifestyle, their attitude, so on and so forth. With a lot of things, it's easy to take extremes in one way or the other. There's an extreme that says that unless a person acts in an extraordinarily holy, pious, clean way in all aspects then that person probably isn't really saved. There's the other extreme that says that you shouldn't expect any change of any kind in any sense in somebody, and both of those are unbiblical. One of them is unbiblical because it assumes that a person is going to instantly attain what the Bible tells us we are going to constantly grow into, this whole idea of sanctification. It is possible for saved believers to continue to struggle sometimes and to commit sins into fall. It can happen. It's also entirely possible that different people will have a different rate of their sanctification. It's true though, that people who do not show

any signs whatsoever likely probably don't have legitimate salvation. It would be the same thing you would say with going to a doctor. If a person has literally none of the symptoms associated with the virus, then they probably aren't infected. We can't say that for sure. But I think one thing that gets people confused when it comes to that present tense is they they think that, or they worry that wherever they are right this second right now, right here, is the thing that determines where their salvation is.

Jeff Laird

And I I think it's interesting when we look at the actual languages that are used in the Bible. There's a little bit of help in there that I think actually goes to continue to confirm that that's not the case. We talked about the idea of salvation as a past tense, and I think when you look at the actual Greek of the New Testament, for example, and without getting into a long, you know convoluted explanation. It has different tenses, past present, future and some others that are a little bit different. But even when you look at the present or future tenses when there's references to actual salvation, they're still making reference to some past event or some single event in a sense. So for example, if we have first Corinthians 1:18, word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. First Corinthians 15, the gospel that was preached in which you stand, by which you are being saved. Second Corinthians, those who are being saved. Those are in a present tense. But they're still referring to this idea that people are coming to, they're arriving at that positional sanctification that one time moment that creates this change. This permanent one time change and relationship.

Jeff Laird

I think that should be comforting to us to remember that yes God is drawing. He is guiding. He is growing us. Yes we should look at our lives. We should look at the circumstances that we're in and say is this consistent with where Christ wants me to be? Is it not consistent with where Christ wants me to be? But we don't need to and shouldn't be looking at every single individual second of our lives as if that's the thing that makes the determination. I I don't remember exactly how CS Lewis, for example framed it, but I believe his concept was something along the lines of a person who's moving towards God at the moment that they died, that person is saved. A person who's moving away from God at the moment that they're, that they pass away is not, and that's not accurate. There's definitely signs that we can see in the way we live our life, but ultimately, even when Scripture talks about present salvation and present sanctification, it's still making reference to the idea that that comes in the context of a one time forever change that happens between us and Christ.

Kevin Stone

I love the fact that we have Philippians 1:6 in our Bibles that that he who began the good work in us will be faithful to complete that work and we have confidence in this. That's how the verse starts out. We are confident in this that God started the work he's going to finish the work. We have the responsibility to cooperate with him and to yield to the Holy Spirit and and to workout our salvation with fear and trembling as as Philippians 2 says. Then the very next verse there in Philippians 2:13 says for it is God who works in you to will and to act to fulfill his good purpose. So we have a responsibility, but it is God's work, ultimately, and ultimately it's all of grace. We cannot justify ourselves, that's the work of God. We cannot sanctify ourselves, that's the work of God, and we definitely cannot glorify ourselves. It's the

work of God. As God's grace reaches down into this world and forgives sinners and lifts us to heaven. It is all on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Shea Houdmann

For me this is something that I early in my Christian life definitely struggled with and I remember I think was actually in Bible College hearing one of the professors kind of explain and explain like which terms go with which aspect of salvation. For example, like when you hear the term justification or redemption or reconciliation. Even like some of the more complicated, the propitiation, satisfaction, substitution, treatment, those ones those are in the past realm of salvation. When you hear terms like sanctification, specifically, progressive sanctification, spiritual growth, Christian maturity, those things are in the present tense, the ongoing. When you hear of glorification ultimate sanctification. And those terms point to the future. And then also the explanation of salvation in the past is what empowers our salvation in the present and what guarantees our salvation in the future.

Shea Houdmann

So all of these things we're talking about there are inextricably linked to each other, and yet it is also important to understand that there are distinctions between the two and we just just be careful when we're teaching scripture or understanding Scripture to understand which aspect of salvation we're talking about. 'cause it all goes back to the perfect and complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross that paid the penalty for our sins and through faith in him by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, we can be saved, have our sins forgiven and then be promised the future salvation, eternal home in heaven with God. And also be empowered to live the life that Christ describes. To fully realize what it's like to be a new creation. To have to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Like Romans 12:2 says. So the salvation in the past is what empowers our salvation in the present and what guarantees are salvation in the future. That means what's the description that was ultimately decisive for me and helping me to understand the security of my salvation. To focus on focus less on the day-to-day struggles that I'm still dealing with and basing my salvation on that, where I'm at my day-to-day walk, but focusing more on what Christ has done. In realizing that's what provides for my salvation. And that's ultimately what I trust in and look to.

Shea Houdmann

As to the question whether I'm saved now, obviously like Justice Jeff was saying, becoming a new creation will impact your life. But that progressive aspect, that's not what we base our salvation on. Our salvation is based on the work of Christ on the cross His death and resurrection, which provided for our salvation and ultimately, our glorification.

Shea Houdmann

So I hope our conversation today has been encouraging to you. I invite you, as always, to dive into scripture, study these things and there are several good articles on Got Questions which discuss these various aspects which we think you'll find helpful. We'll include those in the show notes, the description on YouTube and also at podcast.gotquestions.org. This again, this is the Got Questions podcast on the tenses of salvation. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.