

Believe It!
Why Do We Need A Savior?

Do words really matter? This past year the average 30 second Super Bowl ad cost \$3.5 million. Obviously companies believe that words matter.

I'm sure every one of us can think of words that we wish we wouldn't have said at some time or another. Words matter so much that they can damage relationships and do irreparable harm.

Words are one of the main ways that we have of communicating and describing and expressing.

Words matter. Words are tremendously significant. That's why it's so important that we get our words correct.

Here's a few samples of English signs in foreign countries.

On a bus in China: "Prohibit bring the object that easily burning, easily explosive, poisonous, have radiate and other breach the law and regulations on the bus."

Restroom on a train in China: "No occupation while stabilizing."

On an elevator in Malta: "Attention In An Emergency- When the lift stops because of power cut, do not be afraid but stay calm. Do not touch the door nor the pushes of numbers 0,1,2,3. But you have to shout until somebody hears you and pulls down the lift by hand. Thankyou."

We're serving this for lunch today: "Dried up bean curd with the shape of intestines."

I'm not even sure what this one means...(Welcome: The foreign guest come to rest room."

Words are so important that if we get them wrong we won't be able to communicate.

When God created everything that is He chose to do it through words. He said, "Let there be."

The Bible is called "The Word of God." It's an expression of the very truth of God. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is called "The living Word." He's the image of the invisible God.

For the past several weeks we've been studying through our statement of faith here at this church. Just so that people have a clear understanding of what we recognize as the basic doctrines of the Bible we put together a statement of faith that we believe clearly expresses biblical teaching in key areas.

Today we want to look at an area that is often misdefined.

It contains words and terms that are foundational to biblical Christianity but are so often misunderstood by Christians. This should be something we all agree on, but amazingly that's not always true, even in Bible believing churches like this one. It's the doctrine of salvation.

Salvation is the gift of God brought to man by grace and received by personal faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Man is saved by undeserved mercy through faith and nothing of man enters into his salvation; it is a free gift. Man's efforts, before or after salvation, regardless of how good or well intended, do nothing to secure or guarantee salvation. Nothing can be added to the finished work of Christ. God is absolutely sovereign yet holds man responsible for accepting or rejecting the salvation He has provided. It is God's will that all should be saved and that none should perish.

1. Repentance is necessary for salvation, but the word does not mean, "to turn from sin." No human works are involved in the salvation process, and God does not accept us because we make ourselves worthy of Him.
2. Repentance for salvation means a change of mind from men's ideas of salvation and religion to acceptance of God's way of salvation.
3. "Shallow Christianity" cannot be cured by adding works to the gospel but by a correct understanding of salvation and grace.

There is no more important question than "What happens in eternity?"

We may think the most important things have to do with our marriage, or our job, or our health, or our family. We may think the thing that matters the most is whether that girl we sit next to in class notices us, or whether we have any money in the bank, or whether we're going to be able to make the next car payment.

As important as those things might be now, they're not going to matter one bit 2 minutes after we die. When we open our eyes in eternity (and we will open our eyes in eternity) the only thing that's going to matter forever more will be our relationship with our Creator.

So let's see what the Bible has to say.

I. Salvation Is Of The Lord

There's a principle in I Corinthians 14 which simply says this: *If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?* (I Corinthians 14:8)

If you're going to respond correctly to something, you have to know what you're hearing. That's why it's so important to clearly define our terms.

When people use the word "salvation" it's amazing how many different things they can mean.

We have "Christian" religious groups and denominations that have millions of followers teaching everything from salvation by baptism, working, and being a part of their group, to those who say that while Jesus is important, God forgives sincere people whether they know Jesus or not. They plainly teach that God's at work in all religions.

We have groups that range from those who say everyone will go to heaven when they die to those who say if you're part of their group and you do all the right things you'll be a god someday.

Sometimes it seems like, if you're just creative and persuasive enough you can start your own religion.

Of course, here's the problem with that. You and I do not have the authority to declare spiritual truth. When we start explaining issues like God, eternity, forgiveness, life after death, we're totally out of our league. This is so far above our pay grade, what right do we have to make religious proclamations?

There has to be some spiritual authority other than us saying, "Well I believe..."

That's why we come back over and over to our sole source of authority on spiritual matters, the Bible.

The Bible uses the words "save," "saved," and "salvation" over 400 times. Salvation is a biblical theme that runs all through the 66 books of the Bible.

In the Old Testament the common Hebrew word translated "salvation" is from the verb *yasha*. It means "to rescue," or "to deliver." It's often used for deliverance from enemies,

deliverance from physical troubles.

But it's also the basis for the name of Jesus. The Hebrew *Yehoshua* is actually the name Joshua. It means "Jehovah is Savior."

In New Testament Greek the name is *Iesous*, which is translated "Jesus." Jesus is just the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua.

Now turn to Matthew 1 page 945

A young, godly Jewish girl named Miriam (We say "Mary") was betrothed to an equally godly man named Joseph. Mary turns out to be pregnant. Joseph was going to just quietly end the engagement and then he gets an unexpected visitor.

Read verses 20-21

Mary's pregnancy is supernatural so God picks the name; Jesus (the Savior) because He shall save His people from their sins.

Every act of deliverance from Israel's enemies and trouble by God in the Old Testament was to prefigure the ultimate deliverance from divine judgment by Jesus Christ.

In John 3 Jesus pointed back to a deliverance event in the time of Moses and tied it to His cross.

He said, *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:14, 15)

The Passover meal, which was the basis for communion remembering the cross of Christ, was a memorial to God's physical deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

Repeatedly in the Old Testament God reminded Israel that He was the only Savior. *I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior.* (Isaiah 43:11)

There is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me. (Isaiah 45:21)

Yet I am the LORD your God ever since the land of Egypt, and you shall know no God but Me; For there is no Savior besides Me. (Hosea 13:4)

God is the deliverer, not us, not some religion, not altruistic good works, not philanthropy. God is the deliverer and His Son Jesus is the Savior who came for the express purpose of dealing with the problem of sin.

I. Salvation Is Of The Lord

II. Salvation Is By Grace Alone

Another term that seems to be hard for people to grasp onto is the word “grace.”

It’s like that sign on the Chinese train restroom that says, “No occupation while stabilizing.” By the time you figure out what that means it might be too late!

That’s what it seems that religious do with the very simple, profound word “grace.” They make it so confusing you can’t figure it out.

One religious group says, “We have insisted all along that salvation comes to us by God's grace and our cooperation with it. That's a blend of faith and works.”

Another says, “The purpose of salvation by grace was in fact to make it possible for men to perform the good works which God intended and for which they will be variously judged and rewarded.”

Here’s the problem with “religious speak.” When we take clearly defined truths and muddy up their definitions everybody ends up being confused.

Turn to Romans chapter 5 page 1108

Read verses 6-11

Follow this: Christ didn’t die because we are capable of being good enough. We don’t need a Savior because with a little help from God we can save ourselves.

Look at the descriptive terms here in these verses. Before we receive Christ as Savior we’re ungodly, we’re sinners, we’re under God’s wrath, and we’re God’s enemies. Other verses describe us as dead in sin, lost, and separated from God.

You may not agree with that description, but you’ll have to take that up with God. This isn’t us compared to each other; this is us in the sight of a holy, righteous, perfect God.

That’s why we’re in desperate need of saving grace. The Bible says, *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. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Salvation is of the Lord. Jesus is the Savior. Sin brings God’s wrath and we’re all sinners. We all need salvation and salvation comes by grace through faith.

Grace is favor that’s given when punishment is due. Grace isn’t the favor of God that lets us

do the good works that bring forgiveness. Grace is the favor that brings forgiveness so we can be free to do good works.

And since you can't earn undeserved favor there must be another way to receive it. And here it is...

Back to verses 1-2

If salvation is totally apart from human effort, then it has to come in a totally unique way. If God is the one who deserves the worship and not us then salvation can't be something we earn. If God's standard is absolute and total holiness then there's nothing we can do to fulfill His requirements. If grace is unmerited and undeserved then there's nothing we're going to do to obtain it.

God had to make the way. God's way is faith. It isn't praying a prayer, it isn't going to church, it isn't giving or joining. Those things are what Christians should do, they're not what makes us a Christian.

If we're saved by grace through faith how do we get to grace? How do you experience something that you don't deserve?

It's right here: *we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand*. If grace is non-meritorious then there has to be a non-meritorious way to access it. God says that way is faith.

Faith isn't a work, it isn't something we do, it isn't an action.

A few years back I wrote a letter to a well know pastor who has a large church and a radio program. He was beginning to say some confusing things mixing faith in Christ and discipleship and people in our congregation were asking me about it.

So I wrote a nice letter to him telling what a positive impact he'd had on me in my early years of ministry but how concerned I was at the direction he was taking.

I gat a letter back from someone on the church staff that really blew me away. He included a position paper from their elders which defended the Calvinistic teaching that God must save a person first before they can believe.

And here's their reasoning, and I'll give you a quote. "Because faith is a work." They believe that showing faith is a human work therefore since works can't enter salvation, God must save us first and then we believe.

Well not only does that contradict hundreds of verses like, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*,

and you will be saved. (Acts 16:31) but it contradicts the multitudes of verses that draw a contrast between faith and works.

Romans 11:6 says, *And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*

You can't get any clearer. The doorway to God's grace is faith because faith is not a work and has no merit.

I. Salvation Is Of The Lord

II. Salvation Is By Grace Alone

III. Salvation Comes Through Repentance Towards God

If there was an award given for the most misdefined word in the Bible, the word "repentance" would have to take the prize.

That's why we included a statement on repentance in our statement of faith. It's so misunderstood that there's confusion in our Christian churches, let alone what happens in the cults and false religions.

Here's a statement on repentance from a well-known Christian organization.

Repentance is a "radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience."

Here's what's so dangerous about definitions like that. According to the Bible, Satan's greatest priority is to steer people away from the biblical message of salvation.

The Bible says, *Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.* (II Corinthians 4:4 NLB)

God's message is faith and Satan's message is works. Why? Because faith focuses all glory and worship on God alone. Works puts the attention back on us.

If there was something we could do to appease God and make Him accept us then the attention is on us. God demands and deserves all worship for Himself.

Satan will do anything to deflect that worship from the God he hates.

When we tell people that the Bible says, *Repent and believe the good news!* (Mark 1:15) it's

absolutely crucial that we define the word “repent.”

Ask the average person and they’ll give you the dictionary definition which is, “be sorry and turn from sin.”

If that was accurate, if the Bible was telling people to practice “a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience” to be saved, then you’d have a works based salvation and that’s exactly the message Satan wants people to believe.

Grace flies in the face of everything we feel and everything we experience. Everything within us says that we need to be good enough to get to heaven. But here’s what the Bible says, *I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!* (Galatians 2:21)

If I could keep God’s commandments to be saved then Jesus’ death was a total waste. Jesus paid it all because I couldn’t pay any of it. And as soon I say it’s me and Jesus I’ve destroyed the concept of grace.

If we tell people “turn from your sins and believe” then we’re telling them that God won’t accept them if they don’t make themselves worthy of His forgiveness. You can’t make unworthy sinners worthy by any action on their part.

Besides, how much sin do you have to turn from? I don’t know of anybody that’s turned from all of their sin. That’s not an excuse to ignore sin, it’s just a reality.

So if repentance isn’t turning from sin, what is it?

Repentance for salvation means a change of mind from men’s ideas of salvation and religion to acceptance of God’s way of salvation.

The verb “repent” is a translation of the Greek word, *metanoeo*. It’s a compound word made up of *meta* which means “after” or “another” and *noeo* meaning “perceive” or “think.” The noun form means mind.

Literally to repent means “to think differently,” “to have another mind.”

Let’s look at some verses and see how this plays out...

Turn to Luke chapter 13 page 1024

Here’s another common misconception we all struggle with. Something bad happens and we assume that God must be punishing us. Here Jesus needs to clear something up for some of

His followers.

Read verses 1-5

In both cases Jesus had to clarify. These tragedies didn't happen because the people who suffered them were worse and His followers were better. They needed to repent. They needed to have a radical change of mind that recognized that we all deserve judgment.

And that's exactly what Jesus says we need to do or we're going to perish.

We need to stop looking at everybody else's sins and start seeing ourselves as God sees us and then we'll understand that we need a Savior.

Here's another. **Acts chapter 2 page 1071**

This takes place in Jerusalem at the Feast of Pentecost, 50 days after the crucifixion of Jesus. The city is filled with many of the same Jews who had cried out *His blood be on us, and on our children* (Matthew 27:25)

Now Peter is preaching and here's what he says...

Read verse 36

You crucified your Messiah.

So verse 37

Notice Peter's answer...

Read verse 38

Here's number 1 on the list, repent. Have a radical change of mind. Stop seeing Jesus as an imposter and believe He's the Messiah, stop believing you're all right with God just because you're his chosen people.

One more...**Acts chapter 20 page 1093**

The Apostle Paul is giving a farewell challenge to the elders of the church at Ephesus. He reminds them of a number of things he did. Here's one of them...

Read verses 18-21

He said, “I want to remind you of my message. I never veered off course. I reached repentance toward God and faith in Christ.” When it comes to salvation repentance is toward God.

Here was Paul’s message. God’s holiness was violated by our sin. He must judge sin and yet He chose to judge His Son in our place. Stop seeing God as anything less than perfectly holy. Understand that His justice won’t be satisfied with anything less than a perfect sacrifice.

Repentance sees ourselves as sinners who deserve God’s judgment. Repentance is seeing Jesus Christ as God’s Son who paid the price for our sin. Repentance is seeing God as Holy but gracious to forgive because of Christ.

That’s what leads to faith. That’s what leads to a complete and total trust in the cross. That’s what leads to salvation by grace through faith.

Where are you this morning in the process of spiritual understanding? Are you new on the learning curve? Then check these things out for yourself. Start reading in the Gospel of John, which was specifically written to bring us to faith.

Maybe you’re farther along. Maybe you’ve been reading the Bible or talking to a friend and these things are starting to make sense to you. The Bible says, *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* (II Corinthians 6:2)

But then maybe you’ve already trusted Christ as Savior but you’ve allowed some things to remain in your life that you know don’t please God. In the beginning of the book of Revelation Christ speaks to Christians in seven churches about areas where they needed to repent.

If we really understand the holiness of God and the awfulness of sin, repentance leads to a life of growing in righteousness. Are you really living a life fitting of the repentance that you claim?