

THE BAD NEWS AND GOOD NEWS ABOUT SALVATION

*An Explanation of the Salvation Message
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The Bible says that you are a sinner.

When people hear that statement, “You are a sinner,” they agree. They agree that the world is full of sinners—people who murder, steal, and cheat on their taxes. But compared to all the people who have their pictures on the front page of the paper—for the wrong reasons— many conclude that they are not that bad. Certainly, they reason, God grades on a curve.

Remember in junior high or high school or maybe even in college when the teacher graded on the curve. Some of you are familiar with the Bell curve—no one wins on that thing. Where I grew up we used a different “curve.” If the potential score was 100, and the highest score was 95, then everyone got five points added to his or her grade. But in my class it did not matter. We had an honest-to-goodness brainiac. She never got anything less than a 100. So, a grading curve didn’t mean a thing to me. And you know what—a grading curve does not mean a thing to God.

The standard that God has established is perfection. Try to meet that standard! Even if we could go through our day and sin in word, thought, or deed only one time, we would miss the mark. The Bible says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10).

I once watched a runner lead for 90 meters of a race. Unfortunately, the race was 100 meters and she stumbled at the end and lost. Remember, God’s standard is perfection.

Sometimes we sin not because of something we do, but because of something we don’t do. The Bible says, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (James 4:17).

Now, if we are the least bit honest with ourselves we know our thoughts and are thankful no one else can know them. We know our desires that are far from pure. If we are honest with ourselves we agree with the words the Apostle Paul wrote in the book of Romans: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

The Bad News of the Bible is that man is a sinner...and the Bad News gets worse.

The penalty for sin is death.

The Apostle Paul writes later in the book of Romans, "For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23). Because of our sin, we have earned death. Not just physical death—we all will experience that. The Bible explains a spiritual death; an eternity without God. The Bible calls that eternity separated from God, Hell. The Bible is clear that Hell is a real place, a real eternal existence, and a place of eternal punishment.

Man is a sinner and the future holds an eternity separated from God. We can do nothing about it. That is more Bad News.

But God's Word does not stop with the bad news. God provides a solution for man's problem. God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Since there is no way that you and I can take care of sin and death on our own, God did it for us. God sent His Son—Jesus Christ—to pay the penalty for our sin.

Here is the Good News:

Jesus Christ died for you.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus came to this earth to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. By his death on the cross he paid the penalty for our sin. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Ashley Lajeunesse was a high school student in Red Lake, Minnesota. She was doing math homework in study hall when she heard the first shots ring out. At first she thought another student had dropped a stack of books. But as the sounds continued she and her classmate looked at each other in terror. The teacher in charge was Neva Rogers. She walked to the door, locked it, turned off the lights, and told the students to hide in the back of the room.

Freshman Felicia Hanks stuck her head inside a bookshelf as the shots grew nearer and nearer. Lajeunesse crouched beside her friend Chase Lussier. "Chase shoved me down and told me to stay behind him," Lajeunesse said.

Then the door handle jiggled. A gunshot blast exploded the door's glass panel. A hand reached in to open the door and a large figure—standing over six feet tall—entered the room holding a 12-gauge shotgun. He wore a black hooded trench coat, black bandana, and black pants. His military boots crunched the broken glass as he walked across the floor.

Lajeunesse looked over Lussier's shoulder at the shooter. She recalled, "His face was a mixture of anger and fear." Their eyes met. He raised his gun and fired. Lajeunesse ducked. She felt something warm and wet on her jeans. It was Lussier's blood. Lajeunesse's friend had taken the fatal blow instead of her. "I thought I was going to die," Lajeunesse said. "Chase saved my life."

Eternal death stares each one of us in the eyes. But Jesus has come to take the fatal blow for us. On the cross He died in our place. And the Good News even gets better.

You can be saved by faith.

“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not of works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). You can trust in Jesus Christ as the only one who died for your sins and paid the debt once and for all. Now the question people have is this: What is faith? That’s a great question. Saving faith involves three things:

First, saving faith starts with **knowledge**. A person must know what the Bible says about the human condition and what God has done to fix it. The Bible says that you are a sinner and deserve death. You cannot remedy the situation. But Christ can. He came and died on the cross for your sins. Saving faith begins with this knowledge.

Secondly, there must be **agreement**. Do you agree with what God says? God says you are a sinner. Do you agree with that? Do you agree that the penalty of sin is death—eternal separation from God? Do you agree that you can do nothing to remedy the situation? Do you agree that by trusting in Jesus your sins will be forgiven?

Thirdly, saving faith involves **trust**. Will you trust Christ as the only way to have an eternal relationship with God? The penalty of sin is death. You cannot save yourself. But Jesus has come. He died for your sins. Can you—will you—trust that his death paid the penalty of sin for you.

Will you place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ?

A famous painting hung in a European art gallery. It shows a chessboard with the devil sitting on a chair on one side, a look of gloating triumph all over his face. Across from him is the picture of a dejected, forlorn youth; defeat is stamped all over his face. The title of the painting told the story: “Checkmated.”

In one of his books, John Wesley White says that Paul Murphy, the only American chess champion of the world prior to Bobby Fischer, once toured Europe and visited the gallery. As you can imagine he was attracted to this painting and he stood gazing at it for a long time in silent reflection. Then, all of a sudden he shouted, “Bring me a chessboard; there’s one—and only one, mind you—but there’s one move whereby I can save him!”

God looked down on our plight. Sinners deserving death and not a thing we could do. We were checkmated—no moves on the board. But God made the one move that could remedy our hopeless situation. He sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins.

Today I invite you to place your faith in Him.
Ron Moore

The Devil in Red Lake, Sarah Sturmon Dale. Time, April 4, 2005, pp. 35-37
Huges, Stories and Quotes, 365-66. Originally from John Wesley White, The Devil, 163-64. Tyndale, 1971