

The Gospel of Salvation

Frequently Asked Questions

by: Michael Hardt

Part I: Justification from sins

1. What is the meaning of the word 'Gospel'?

The Greek word means 'good news'. In Ancient Greece, when a battle was won, a messenger was sent to the city and, coming nearer, he would exclaim this one word 'evangelion': good news – the battle is won! Man did not seek God! But the good news is that God seeks man (see Luke 15)!

2. What is the subject of the Gospel?

In the Bible the gospel tells us how, when man had completely failed, God established a way for man to come to God. This way is through His Son, the Lord Jesus, who was and is God but became man and died on the cross for sinners: "the gospel of God... concerning His son" (Rom 1:1,3). This is the one and only way that leads to God. Man did not seek God but the good news is that God sought man (see Luke 15).

3. Why was Paul not ashamed of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16-17)?

For several reasons. First, it is the 'power of God' to everyone who believes (v. 16). The gospel has the power to transform people and to bring them to God (if they accept and believe). Also, the gospel is universal (for Jews and Gentiles, v. 16). Finally, the righteousness of God is shown ('revealed') in this Gospel.

4. What is the righteousness of God?

God is righteous ¹ : when He condemns the sinner in His wrath (Rom. 1:17-18), when He raised Jesus and gave Him a place of honour (John 16:10), and when He

forgives sins which are confessed (1 John 1:9), when He justifies those who believe on Jesus (Rom. 3:25; 4:5). Especially the last of these is surprising at first sight. To see why, have a look at question 12.

5. Who needs the Gospel?

Everyone. Paul divides mankind into three groups: the barbarians, the civilised heathens, and the Jews. Everyone belongs to one of these three groups. And Paul demonstrates (Romans 1:18-2:23) that each group is guilty before God, without the gospel is everyone without hope.

6. Are there no exceptions? What about cultivated people? Or Israel?

No. The barbarians are guilty (even if they never heard the gospel) because they could have known the creator simply by looking at creation around them but they refused. The civilised people made rules but did not keep them. And Israel had the law, and broke it. "There is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:10). "For there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

7. Is there no solution? How can man come to God?

There is. To see what exactly this solution is, bear in mind that God is a righteous judge. And he is omniscient. He knows each and every one of your sins. There are only two options. Either He must condemn you or you must become 'righteous' before Him. To see how this can be done, please look at the following questions.

¹ God is love (1 John 4:16), but God is also light (1 John 1:5).

8. What does it mean to be 'justified' (Rom. 3:20)?

Justified means 'declared righteous'. This is even better than innocent. If you are justified you can point to Christ at God's right hand and say 'I belong to Him, that's why I'm righteous'. Innocent Adam could not do this. So, if someone wanted to condemn you as guilty, he would first have to condemn Christ as unrighteous – and this is impossible.

9. What is meant by 'works of the law' (Rom. 3:20)?

Works of the law are not only works aimed at keeping the law of Moses but works aiming at keeping any kind of law (literally: 'works of law'). The people of Israel proved this in the case of the law of Moses. But it is a general principle. There are no works, there is nothing that man can do, which would make him just or righteous before God.

10. So how can anyone be justified then before God (Rom. 3:22-25)?

As far as we are concerned, only by faith. As far as God is concerned, only by grace. By faith means that we trust in Christ, that He has paid the price for our sins and that this is enough. By grace means that we can only accept, we cannot do anything and we cannot add anything. But we are also justified by blood. By blood means that the Lord Jesus had to die (as our substitute).

11. What is meant by 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood'? (Rom. 3:25)

'Propitiation' or 'atonement' means 'covering' (in Hebrew). In the Old Testament it was used for the lid ('cover') of the ark of the covenant. The tables of the law were in the ark (declaring that man was guilty). The cherubim looked down onto the golden lid of the ark which speaks of the immaculate glory of God (so they had to acknowledge that God had to condemn man). But then the lid of the ark was sprinkled with blood (Lev. 16), the blood of an innocent victim, shed for a guilty people. So God could spare His people. This is a picture of what Christ has done: He gave his life, His blood was shed, so that God does not have to judge us. We are 'covered' by His giving his life for us.

12. How can God justify a sinner and at the same time be just?

Because Christ became the substitute. If you pay my debt, then what can the judge do? Nothing! Someone else has paid on my behalf. No man could have invented such a wonderful message. God forgives (this is wonderful in itself) but God does not 'overlook' sins. He forgives after having judged sins and condemned sin. The problem has been solved, but in a righteous way.

13. What about Old Testament Saints? How were they justified (Rom. 4)?

In the same way as New Testament believers: by faith. Abraham believed God and this was counted righteousness for him. And God could do this, righteously, because He looked at the (then future) sacrifice of Christ: Romans 3:25-26.

14. But does not James say that Abraham was justified by works?

Well, yes. But James is talking about justification before men (works as a proof of faith, Jas. 2:21). How could men see that Abraham was righteous? Only by his works. When he went to offer Isaac he gave the proof. But God knew long before that Abraham believed. And He counted him righteous then (Gen. 15:6-7).

15. What are the consequences of justification (Rom. 5:1)?

We have peace with God. This is tremendous. No issues between God and us! Nothing that separates. Unbelievers are at enmity with God and need to be reconciled with Him. For a believer there is peace (not only a promise that he will have peace with God, but he has it already!). And there is much more: read Romans 5:1-11 to see the wonderful consequences of justification and peace with God.

16. Why did Christ have to be raised for our justification?

The work of Christ was done when He said 'it is finished' and delivered up His spirit (John 19:30). But without His resurrection, how would we know that His death was sufficient for God? Now that Christ is raised we have the proof. God was fully satisfied with Him and accepted His work (Rom. 4:25).

which ends our link with Adam. Christ becomes our new head.

Part II: Deliverance from the Power of Sin

When people come to Christ, confess their sins and trust Him that His work on the cross of Calvary was sufficient for them, they are full of joy. They realise that they have ‘peace with God’ (5:1). Many of them go and tell everyone what they have found and how happy they are. And then, suddenly, it happens. Something goes wrong, they have a bad thought or say a bad word, or worse. What now? They are starting asking themselves: how could I do this? I had confessed all my sins and accepted Christ as my Saviour. And now I have done it again ... And then doubts come. Was my conversion real? Did I repent enough? Why did I sin again?

The following questions and answers will help you find your way out of this dilemma.

1. What is the difference between sins and sin?

It’s like fruits and trees. Sins are sinful actions, like the fruits produced by a tree. Sin is the tree itself, the source which produces the sinful deeds, in a word: the evil nature in man.

2. What is the divine solution for sins and for sin?

Sins are forgiven. If you believe in Christ you are justified from your sins. But sin as such can never be forgiven or pardoned. It can only be condemned. And this is what God did on the cross (Rom. 8:3). Acts can be forgiven, but a bad nature must be condemned.

3. Is a believer still under the power of sin?

No. A believer can sin (1 John 2:1) but a believer does not have to sin. And he should not sin. To see how a believer is freed from the power of sin, look at the following questions.

4. What are the two families in Romans 5?

Naturally, every human being is a son or daughter of Adam. But those who accept Christ and believe on Him now belong to His family (or race). It is death

5. And what is the consequence of belonging to the family of Adam?

Every child of Adam inherits something from him: sin. And as a result of sin there is death. Until today death is everywhere and proves that sin has reached every child of Adam.

6. And what is the consequence of belonging to the family of Christ?

The grace of God has abounded to many, and justification came (Rom. 5:15-19). In other words, every member of the family of Christ is justified.

7. So, if I have become part of the family of Christ, and if all of this is by grace, can I continue to sin?

No – grace is never an excuse for sin (see also next question).

8. Why not?

Because ² we are dead. We have died with Christ (see questions on Rom. 6). Christ died on the cross, didn’t He? And we belong to Christ. We were baptised unto Christ. In baptism ‘unto Christ’ we are ‘identified’ with Him, we are one with Him. Therefore, if Christ died, we died as well (as far as our old man is concerned, the ‘child of Adam’).

9. So, how come that, at times, I still commit a sin? Am I not dead with Christ?

Well, the old man died with Christ. But the believer learns, often through painful experience, that he still has the flesh in him. Therefore, he still can sin. For more on this see questions on Romans 7.

² There are other reasons as well! To continue in sin would be an insult to grace and to Christ Himself who suffered for our sins (if you have received Christ and know the great price He has paid (His blood shed), you want to please Him, not to insult Him by going on in sin).

10. What is meant by 'our old man is crucified with Him' (Rom. 6:6)?

My 'old man' is my person before my conversion, as a child of Adam, a member of Adam's family (Rom. 5:12 ff). Before my conversion I was responsible before God and guilty. But this old, say, 'Michael' has been crucified. So the believer is no longer 'in the flesh (of Adam)' but 'in the Spirit' (Rom. 8:8-9). He no longer exists. Can you feel this? No. But it is still true – because God says so.

11. What is meant by 'that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin' (Rom. 6:6b)?

The 'body of sin' is the whole mechanism or system of sin in us before our redemption. A believer (should not but) can still commit a sin because the flesh (old nature) still dwells in him; BUT: sin is no longer the prevailing power.

12. The problem of our SINS is solved by the death of Christ for us. But how is the problem of SIN and its power solved?

Not by Christ's death for us, but by our death with Christ. Compare it to the relationship of a servant and his master. The master has claims over the servant, but only as long as the servant lives. Once the servant dies, his master can do nothing. So with us. As we have died with Christ, sin has no claim or authority over us.

13. What is the meaning of baptism?

Baptism means identification with Christ. As Christ died and was buried so we have been baptised (Rom. 6:2-3). Baptism also speaks of other things, for instance that the person baptised becomes a disciple (John 4:1-2 and 1 Cor. 10:2) etc., but the point here in Romans 6 is that we are identified with Christ in His death, i.e. have died with him.

Note: being baptised is no reason you go to heaven.

14. So how do I know that I have died with Christ? Can I feel it?

No. You cannot feel it. If you have accepted Christ in faith, then it simply is a fact and you know it because God's word tells you in his word.

15. If I have died with Christ, how does that affect my relationship with SIN?

Sin (the principle of evil, of opposition against God) no longer has any claims over you. Like the man who paid a large sum so that he did not have to go to war and someone went in his stead. When the government wrote to him saying 'you need to go to war now, your substitute has died' he wrote back saying 'I am sorry I cannot go to war, I am dead'. He realised that he had a right to consider himself dead because his substitute had died.

16. If I have died with Christ, what does that mean practically in my daily life?

When sin wants to exert a claim over us we are entitled (and obliged) to consider ourselves dead (see previous question).

17. Should a believer keep the law then (or at least some rules) to make sure he does not sin?

No. Law keeping, or even rule keeping is not the way to go. It is a carnal principle (because it relies on the natural ability of man). As soon as you try you will have to admit (if you are honest) that you fail. Paul explains that we are dead to the law (just as we are dead to sin), Romans 7:1-6.

Note: in addition, the law of Moses was only ever given to one people (Israel).

18. How, then, can a believer live in a way that pleases God?

Not by keeping the law but by being occupied with Christ. This will result in us becoming more like Him and living for Him in our daily lives. If we allow the Holy Spirit to occupy us with Christ, then the Holy Spirit will give us the power to live in a way that pleases God (see questions on Rom. 8:1-4).

19. Who is the 'I' in Romans 7 (vv. 7-25)? Is it Paul?

No. It can't be Paul, because he says: 'For I was alive without the law once...' (v. 9). This cannot apply to Paul who was brought up as a strict Pharisee (Phil. 3:5).

20. Who is the 'I' in Romans 7? Is it a normal believer?

No. It cannot be a normal believer. The statement 'I am carnal, sold under sin' (v. 14), can hardly be the description of a normal believer.

21. Who is the 'I' in Romans 7? Is it an unbeliever?

No, it can't be. The person in Romans 7 already has the new nature: he wants to do what is good (v. 19), and says 'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man' (v. 21). Clearly, these are the desires of the new nature which God gives at new birth (John 3:3).

22. Who is the 'I' in Romans 7? So who is it then?

It is a person who has been born again (see previous question), but is not spiritual but carnal, relying on his strength, trying to keep the law, trying to do what is good (in his own strength) and therefore constantly failing, and extremely unhappy. He does not know that the most 'spiritual' or well meaning flesh is still flesh. This is not the normal state of a Christian. But many pass through this state at some stage in their lives until they learn to trust not only in Christ but also in His work as sufficient to them, i.e. until they are 'delivered'.

23. What is the person's problem?

Time and again, the person discovers a great dilemma. It is the battle between his new and his old nature. There are good things he wants to do and he ends up not doing them. Then there are bad things he does not want to do but falls back, again and again, into doing them.

24. What does this person discover?

At least three things. First that he still has the old nature (sin). Then that nothing good dwells in him personally. And finally that he cannot deliver himself but needs someone else to deliver him.

25. The 'I' in Romans 7 has now understood that he cannot pull himself out of the mud. Where does help come from?

Towards the end of the chapter this person stops looking for help within himself and starts looking for

help outside himself. It is not '*how shall I deliver myself*' but '*who shall deliver me...?*' (v. 24).

26. What conclusion is reached in Romans 7?

A twofold one. First, the person has learned by experience that he cannot do anything good of himself, there is no good in his flesh (v. 18). Then he realises that there are the two natures, the old and bad one and the new one. They are opposed to each other. Then, he thanks God (v. 25) because he realises: only God can deliver him. The full conclusion is then reached in Romans 8:1-11 (see next question).

27. So can a believer ever be condemned by God?

No – the reason being that the believer is now 'in Christ'. And, remember, Christ is glorified at God's right hand. So if anyone wanted to condemn the believer, he would have to condemn Christ – impossible!

28. What is meant by the 'law of the Spirit of life' and 'the law of sin and death'?

The word 'law' can also mean 'principle'. A stone falls to the ground. This is a 'law' of nature. The 'law' of the Spirit is also a principle, namely that the Spirit guides us and occupies us with Christ. The law of sin is also a principle, namely opposition to God which leads to death. Once the believer gives Christ the credit, believes that His work is sufficient and that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (i.e. once he believes 'the gospel of his salvation', Eph.1:13), the Spirit of God is free to operate in him.

29. What is God's solution for sin?

Not to forgive it (only sins, the deeds, are forgiven), but to condemn it. There is no other way which matches the nature of God than to condemn sin. The law could not achieve anything against sin because it was 'weak through the flesh', i.e. man was not able to keep it.

30. Now, does all of this mean that the believer does things like stealing and killing etc. which were forbidden under the law? Why not?

No. The righteous claims of the law are fulfilled in the believer. But the reason is not that he tries to keep the law but that he walks by the Spirit.

31. How does this work practically – walking in the Spirit?

Well, the Spirit occupies the believer with Christ (John 14 and 16). This fills the believer with joy and with a desire to become like Christ. As we imitate Christ, the claims of the law are fulfilled ‘automatically’, as a ‘by-product’.

Let’s take an example. The law says ‘thou shalt not steal’. A believer is not under the law, but the Spirit occupies the believer with Christ. Christ was rich but became poor. He said: giving is more blessed than receiving. As the believer learns to love Christ and imitates Him, he wants to benefit others. How can he possibly steal?

32. But does a believer always walk in the Spirit?

It would be normal if he did, but, sadly, this is not always the case as we know from experience. A believer is generally led by the Spirit, but it is possible that a believer ‘grieves’ the Spirit. This happens every time a believer sins, because he is not occupied with Christ or does not live under the eye of Christ, in fellowship with Him.

33. How can we make sure we walk in the Spirit?

Simply by putting away everything that grieves the Spirit. If you harbour bad thoughts, you need to confess this before the Lord. If you say a bad word, the same applies. Don’t wait – keep short accounts with God. If we do this, the Spirit is free again to occupy us with Christ and to ‘lead us’ (Rom. 8:14). Then we will ‘mortify the deeds of our body’ (Rom. 8:13), and walk in the Spirit.

34. What does God do to help us walk in the Spirit?

God has sent us His Spirit to dwell in us (Rom. 8:10-11). The Holy Spirit now dwells in the believer (see

also 1 Cor. 6:19), occupies us with Christ (John 16:14), and He gives us the consciousness that God is our FATHER (Rom. 8:15-16). This is complete salvation: justified from sins, delivered from the power of sin, and knowing God as a loving Father through the Holy Spirit!

35. If our salvation is so complete, why do many believers still suffer in their bodies and die? Is the body not included in our salvation?

Believers still suffer because they are still part of creation. Paul explains this in the next paragraph (Rom. 8:18-29). Through man, sin came into the world and, as a result, the whole creation ‘groans’. BUT: this problem will be solved as well. We wait for the ‘redemption of our body’ (v. 23). When Christ comes, we receive new bodies. Meanwhile, we have this ‘hope’ and the Spirit who helps us in our infirmities.

If there are two teams in the world cup final, but one of them does not show up for the match, then the other team has won – but without glory. They would be the champion but not a glorified one. God wants to glorify Himself in the presence of evil.

36. Has God pre-destinated anyone to condemnation?

No. The Bible never says so. God wants all men to be saved: Titus 2:11 and 1 Timothy 2:4. Also, God “now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:20). In Romans 9:18 it says that God hardens whom He will (but only after man has hardened himself, as the example of Pharaoh shows (vv. 14-17). Romans 9:22-23 states very carefully that He prepared the vessels of mercy unto glory, but that the vessels of wrath are prepared unto condemnation (not that God did so). See also Romans 2:5. THE WONDERFUL GOSPEL OF SALVATION IS OPEN TO EVERYONE!

SUMMARY

There are three great problems that plague mankind:

1. sins (= sinful actions)
2. sin (= the principle of evil, the source of evil actions), and
3. physical sufferings.

The first problem is solved by the death of Christ for us.

The second problem is solved by our death with Christ.

The third problem is solved when Christ returns.

But in each case, we owe everything to Christ!

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