



## Theology in a nutshell

BY KEN HORN

# SIN

# & SALVATION

**Editor's note: This is the 10th article in the series Theology in a Nutshell.**

Chen\* was being difficult. I sat in my study speaking to this agnostic graduate student. I was pastoring in a university city, and I frequently had the opportunity to discuss the claims of the gospel with skeptics and cynics. This was our third or fourth meeting and I was frustrated. He wouldn't budge.

To my mind, I had used flawless logic and impeccable apologetics; I had answered every argumentative question; I had drawn on my reservoir of knowledge and proved my case. But Chen still wouldn't budge.

On this occasion, as he spoke, my mind was racing for yet another answer when a still, small voice interrupted my thoughts. *Try the simple gospel*, said the voice.

*But God, I know the answer to this.*

*Try the simple gospel* was His reply.

I interrupted the young man in mid-sentence. "Excuse me for interrupting. We can return to that thought later if you like. But I need to share something with you."

I proceeded to share the simple plan of salvation. It turned out he had never heard a clear presentation of the gospel. The wall came down ... and I led him in the sinner's prayer. We never returned to the thought I had interrupted. A short time later he was baptized in

water as a new believer in Christ.

Let's look at *why* Chen needed Christ and *how* he became a Christian — the same why and how every human being must deal with.

### SIN

Sin is the problem. Salvation is the solution. Salvation solves humanity's greatest problem, the sin that separates everyone from God.

### God did not create sin.

The Bible teaches that God is holy and there is no unrighteousness in Him (Isaiah 6:3; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 92:15). God equipped His created beings with freedom of will. Worship would be meaningless if we were forced to do it. So the intelligent beings God created — angels and humans — were given free will.

It was misuse of this gift that introduced sin, first in the angelic realm when Satan and the other fallen angels chose to rebel against God, and second in humanity.

### Mankind fell; God didn't push them.

Adam and Eve fell. Perfect beings, created in God's image, exercised their God-given will to make poor choices. Eve, tempted by Satan, fell first, then offered the forbidden fruit to Adam (Genesis 3:1-8). It appears that Eve was deceived, but Adam knew what he was doing (1 Timothy 2:14). Someone has said, "Eve fell; Adam jumped."

Theology calls this original sin. It originated in the human heart, setting a pattern for all sin to follow: People sin when they are so selfish they put their desires above God's.

### All people are sinners.

In some way this original sin affected/infected all of mankind. Theologians have used the term "original sin" to refer to the state of each of us when born. It is also called a sin nature.

The sin nature is greatly debated by theologians. What's important is the Bible clearly says we are all sinners. We all make the decision to give in to sin: "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12, NKJV). "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

### DEFINITIONS OF SIN

*Sin is missing God's standard.* The Greek word for "sinned" in Romans 3:23 literally means "to miss the mark." Sin is missing the mark of God's standards.

*Sin is disobeying God's law.* "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). It is transgressing or violating laws God has put in place. As a permanent attitude, lawlessness is rebellion against God (James 2:10,11; Galatians 3:10).

To the contrary, "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10).

*Sin is worldliness.* John Piper said, "Sin is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with God" (in his book *Future Grace*). Romans 12:2 says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Even Christians are susceptible to worldliness. H. Richard Niebuhr said, "The crisis of the church ... is not the crisis of the church in the world, but of the world in the church."

*Sin is a state of ungodliness, living apart from God.* Even "good" people can be in this state. This is the state everyone is in before receiving Christ. "As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one'" (Romans 3:10). Though people may do good deeds, apart from Christ, these are just "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

### There are degrees of sin.

The person apart from God is in the highest degree of sin, living as a captive to his sin and being an enemy of God. Only receiving Christ can rectify this.

Individual sins range from willful sins (Psalm 19:13; Isaiah 5:18) to sins of weakness, like Peter's denial of Christ.

# The real power of God is found in the simple message of the gospel.

## Sin is not just what you do; it can also be what you don't do.

A sin of neglect is called a sin of omission. A high school religion exam included the question "What is a sin of omission?" One student's creative answer was: "A sin I should have committed but didn't."

Nice try, but not quite right. James 4:17 describes such a sin: "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

Failing (refusing) to do good when the opportunity presents itself is the sin of omission.

## Sin brings consequences — death, or separation from God.

Sin brings the most dire consequences: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

## SALVATION

But there is hope for deliverance from the consequences of sin. Romans 6:23 concludes, "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Although every one of us deserves death, through Jesus we can receive the gift of eternal life.

## Salvation is not a feeling.

Martin Luther said there were times when he didn't feel saved. But he knew he was.

There are some living in false confidence, believing they are saved, but they are not. There are others who fear they are lost, but they are saved indeed. Full assurance can be found in knowing one has obeyed the Scriptures' direction for obtaining salvation.

## There is one way to receive salvation: through Jesus Christ.

The tolerant position is pluralistic: "All paths lead ultimately to God." A true Christian has virtually no common ground with people holding this view, and will

almost always be seen as narrow-minded and inflexible. And you know what? We are. Jesus said, "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life" (Matthew 7:14). On an issue as big as eternal life, we dare not bend.

John 14:6 defines the way to salvation: "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (NIV). A Christian should never apologize for being "narrow-minded." Apologize only if you keep the truth to yourself.

## The plan of salvation (the gospel) is simple.

When I departed from complex arguments and presented the simple gospel to Chen, the graduate student, he eagerly came to Christ. God often takes our complex, intricate solutions and pares them down to humble size. The real power of God is found in the simple message of the gospel.

## There is nothing you can do to earn salvation.

In the words of George Whitefield: "Works? Works? A man get to heaven by works? I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand!"

Jerry\* had been coming to our church with his wife for a few weeks and I felt it was time to give him a personal, direct invitation to come to Christ. His response: "Pastor, I'm not good enough. As soon as I can give up my drinking, then I'll get saved."

I was clear with him: "You don't change so you can get saved; you come to God with all your sins and let Him do the changing."

## STEPS TO SALVATION

The ABCs of Salvation that follow include the biblical steps necessary. Repentance means turning away from sin and turning to God. It means being sorry for your sin and being willing to let God turn your life around.

## When Jesus has become your Lord and Savior, you have a whole new way to deal with sin.

Christ breaks sin's grip; you are no longer in bondage to it. However, since Christians are not made perfect, they still find the need to ask Christ for forgiveness when they sin. First John 1:9 has been called "the Christian's bar of soap": "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The person who has received salvation can look forward to a life of victory and an eternity in God's presence. **tpe**

\*Name has been changed

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# ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

## A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

## Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

## B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

## Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

## C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

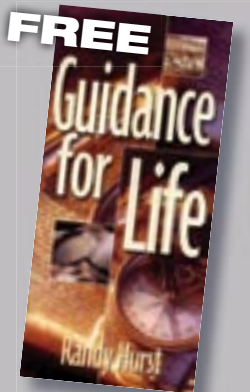
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

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