**How Can a Sinful Person be Made Right with God?**

***God is Creator***

If God is real, and the bible is true, what does that mean for me? That’s the most significant question anyone could ever ask.

God is the Creator of all things. As such, He really needs nothing from you and me. In fact, we are dependent upon Him for our very lives. Acts 17:24-25 says: “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.”

God doesn’t need us. We need Him. He is the one who sustains us each and every day. Now, if I’m a child and my parents are the ones who take care of me, doesn’t that also imply that I’m therefore accountable to them? It’s the same with God. Because we’re dependent upon God for our very lives, it is to Him that we must give an account. Heb 4:13 says: “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” He knows us through and through: who we are, how we think, what we do, and why we do it. He knows our hearts. Nothing is hidden from God.

The day is coming when God will judge us by His perfect standard. Acts 17:31 says: “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” Of course, He’s talking about His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate judge.

***Righteousness is Required***

You might ask why it is that God must judge us. It’s not that He’s cruel and simply enjoys judging people. It’s that He must judge us by virtue of His very nature: His character. God must judge us by His perfect standard because He is holy, righteous, and just. Therefore, he cannot look upon sin and be pleased with it. Referring to God, Hab. 1:13 says, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.”

Think of it this way. If you could get closer to the sun than Icarus whose wax wings burned up, you yourself would burn up. It’s not because the sun is evil; it’s because it’s hot. It’s the nature of the sun to be hot. And, it’s not that God has merely chosen to judge sin. It’s that He’s holy. It’s the nature of God to hate sin. He is perfectly righteous.

Let’s go one step further. If God cannot tolerate sin, then in order for us to be accepted by Him, we must be perfectly righteous. The problem is that none of us are righteous. Rom. 3:10-12 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." You might do some good things in a cultural sense. Or you might be a good person compared to others. But you’re not perfect. You have sinned against God. And not only that, everything you do is sin if you don’t do it to exalt God. Your motives are self-centered, and that’s sin against God.

I know that’s hard to understand. But to say that God is holy is to say that God is different than us. That’s what the word holy means: set apart. God is unique. He is set apart from us. We’re not like Him. We’re sinners, and therefore we can’t completely understand Him. But we can understand what He’s revealed to us in Scripture.

God’s wrath abides upon us because we’re not righteous. Rom. 1:18-21 says: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” God has plainly revealed Himself through creation. The problem is we can’t see that on our own. We’ve suppressed the truth He’s given us, because we’re sinners by nature. Lady Gaga was right about one thing: we’re born that way. But, what she doesn’t understand is that we’re held accountable by God.

***Adam is Head***

As we’ve seen, God has revealed Himself to us, but we’ve rejected that revelation. That rejection is why God’s wrath is upon us and why we have no excuse. The reason we’ve rejected God is because we’re sinners by nature and by choice. We inherited a sinful nature from the first man, Adam. He was the representative of the entire human race. What he did, he did in our place. Rom. 5:12 says, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” Death entered the world and spread to all of us through Adam. And we affirmed what he did and our sinful natures by sinning ourselves. We all sin in thought, word, or deed on a regular basis.

Further, when Adam sinned, he suffered God’s penalty: death. Gen. 2:16-17 says, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.”

That day, Adam died spiritually. To die spiritually is to be separated from God; they no longer had fellowship.

Adam was our representative, and his sin nature is passed down to each one of his posterity. Because we inherit a sinful nature from Adam, we are born spiritually dead, separated from God, and are by nature under the wrath of God. Eph. 2:1-3 says, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of God’s wrath.”

We are born physically alive, but spiritually dead. Because we are by nature dead in sin, we do not want, nor can we understand the things of God. 1 Cor. 2:14 says: “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Without the Spirit of God at work, we think the bible is foolishness.

Moreover, because we’re sinners by nature, we sin by choice. Rom. 3:23 says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Tragically, the penalty for our sin is spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death. Rom. 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death.”

***Christ is Savior***

The Scriptures declare that none is righteous, none seeks after God, none want God, and none can receive the things of God. Additionally, God is Holy and just and cannot look upon sin. But the Bible also teaches that God is full of grace and mercy and has determined to redeem a people for Himself. Matt. 1:21 says, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

God has provided salvation/deliverance from sin, death, and His wrath, in the person and work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is nothing less than God making Himself known to us. Christ is nothing less than God in the flesh. Matt. 1:23 says, “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him ‘Immanuel,’ which means, ‘God with us.’”

The righteousness that we so desperately need is provided in Christ Jesus. 2 Cor. 5:21 says, “For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Further, 1 Pet 3:18 says, “For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit.”

Of course, we’re talking about Christ’s death on the cross. Remember, the bible says the wages of sin is death. At the same time, Jesus never sinned. But He took the place of guilty sinners. He stood before the judge and took their penalty. He died that they might have life. Because He had no sin, death could not hold Him, and He was raised up three days later.

Now don’t miss this. A person is made right with God by faith in Christ and what He did for her on the cross. For the believer, in salvation, her sin is actually credited to the account of Christ. It is your sin that put Him on the cross. But the righteousness of Christ is credited to the account of the sinner. The sinner who trusts in Jesus stands clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The sinner is not righteous in herself but has been declared righteous by God based upon the fact that the righteousness of Christ has been credited to her account. What a gracious and glorious transaction!

***Effort is Useless***

How does that work? Well, because God cannot look upon sin with favor, and because we’re sinners by nature and by choice, we cannot save ourselves, and we cannot earn or work our way into Heaven or God’s favor. Even the good works we do are filthy in God’s sight, because our sin comes from the heart. Isa. 64:6 says, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” That’s pretty bleak.

We cannot focus on what we do, but what is in our heart. Jer. 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Jesus said in Mark 7:20-23, “That which comes out of the man, that defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”

If we try to make ourselves right before God by doing good or not doing evil, or by being religious, we are deceived and doomed to Hell. Rom. 3:20 says, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” We can’t make ourselves right with God by obeying even His law. We’re not good enough or even able. We only know what sin is because of His law. We have no ability to obey it from the heart. We are selfish and not God-focused on our own.

The fact is that there is nothing you can do to save yourself. God cannot be pleased with any effort you offer Him, nor will He accept your sinful efforts that come from your own selfish motivation. You are helpless, and you have nothing to offer God (Rom. 8:7).

***Grace is Given***

But there is hope. In your helpless condition you need grace. Luke 18:9-14 says, “And Jesus spoke this parable unto certain persons which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee (self-righteous religious leader), and the other a publican (thieving tax collector). The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank you, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the publican, standing far off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but beat upon his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified (made right with God) rather than the other: for every one that exalts himself shall be brought down; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.”

Grace means that God gives you something you don’t deserve. It’s a free gift. Rom. 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Grace has nothing to do with you or your good works. It has everything to do with God. Eph. 2:8-9 says, “For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

***Repentance is Needed***

So how do we get this grace? When the Jews were confronted with their sin by Peter they were told to repent. Acts 2:37-38 says, “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said unto them, ‘Repent.’”

To repent is to change your mind about God, yourself, Christ, and how to be saved, or how to be made right with God. When you change your mind, you will change your direction. You will no longer live to please self, but you will live to please God. Genuine repentance is a gift from God. 2 Tim. 2:25-26 says, “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him to do his will.”

Repentance isn’t just feeling sorry for your sin. There’s a difference between worldly repentance and God’s gift of repentance unto salvation. 2 Cor. 7:10 says, “For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation not to be regretted: but the sorrow of the world produces death.” Worldly repentance is feeling sorry that you were caught in sin. Godly repentance is being sorry that you have grieved Holy God.

If God grants you biblical repentance you will evidence it in your life. In Acts 26:20, “Paul showed first to them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works that corresponded to their repentance.” But again, we’re not talking about earning salvation.

***Acceptance is Faith***

Genuine repentance is turning from your way of thinking and doing, and turning to God’s way of thinking and doing. This turning is completed by placing your faith, or trust, in Christ alone for salvation. When Paul and Silas were in prison at Philippi, the jailer in Acts 16:30-31 brought them out, and said, “’Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.’”

You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. That means that you must cast yourself upon Him for mercy. You must trust Him alone for salvation. To believe on Christ doesn’t mean that you simply believe the facts about who Jesus is and what He did. James 2:19 says, “You believe that there is one God; you do well: the demons also believe, and tremble.” John 2:23-25 says, “Now when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and didn’t need anyone to testify of anyone: for He knew what was in each of their hearts.”

“Believing on” Christ is different than merely “believing in” Christ. To believe on Christ means that Christ is your life. Your focus is on Him, and He directs your paths. It’s a commitment of the heart to Him as Lord. It’s humble submission to Him as King. It’s an abiding trust in Him as Savior. Jesus said in John 15:4-8, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” To believe on Christ is to have saving faith. Saving faith always results in a life of obedience. To be clear, a life of obedience doesn’t lead to saving faith, but saving faith leads to a life of obedience.

***Change is Evident***

To put it another way, when a person’s sins are forgiven and she is saved by God, change is evident, because salvation is a work of God. It’s not something that we do, it’s something that God has done for us in Christ. The work of Christ is applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit. Without this application of the work of Christ by the Holy Spirit, you cannot see the Kingdom of God. God must work in your heart.

In biblical terms, you must be born again. There is no salvation outside of being born again by the Spirit of God. At birth, persons are born physically alive, but spiritually dead. That’s why they must be born again spiritually, so they can be spiritually alive. Only then will they desire the things of God. Consider John 3:1-8, “Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night, and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’”

We can’t see God the Holy Spirit, but we can see the evidence of His work in our lives. Have you been born again? Is there evidence that would indicate God has changed your life? Has God made a real difference in your life? The bible tells us that our lives will evidence our new birth or lack thereof. Consider Gal. 5:19-24, “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

According to God’s word, if our lifestyles revolve around the deeds of the flesh, that’s an indication that we’ve not been born again. If we’ve been born again our lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit. Why? If we do not have the Spirit of God in our lives, we produce the deeds of our flesh. If we do have the Spirit of God in our lives, He produces His fruit in us. What does your life look like?

***Eternity is Secure***

If a person is born again it is God’s work by grace through faith in Christ and His substitutionary death on the cross. Because the new birth and the entire work of salvation is all of God and none of us, once a person is saved, she is saved forever. She is kept by God’s power. Peter said in 1 Pet 1:3-5, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Even though you can’t follow God without His salvation and work in your life, it is your responsibility to make sure that you are saved and are following Him. Call upon Him to have mercy upon you and work in your life. Remember, we have this promise in Rom 10:13, “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Do you understand the truth of what we’ve been talking about? In Jn 6:44 Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.” Do you sense God drawing you to Himself? Put your faith in Christ right now. Heb 4:7 says, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” In your own words, speaking to God Himself because He is right here with you, tell God what is on your heart and what you need Him to do. The words of your prayer are not magic. God looks upon your heart. You simply need to cast yourself upon His mercy and commit yourself to Him by His grace and for His glory.

You are now a disciple, a follower, of Jesus Christ. It is your privilege and responsibility to find a Bible-believing church, be baptized, and serve the Lord faithfully with His people. Nothing less will please the Lord or ensure your spiritual growth and peace. Jesus Himself said in Matt 28:18-20, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Finally, what happens when you die? “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him, He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for their salvation” (Heb. 9:27).

Please call or write if you would like to speak with someone about these things. May God grant you grace unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.