

DO YOU KNOW FOR SURE?

The answer to how you can know for sure whether you will go to heaven or not when you die is found in the Bible. It has a message that everybody needs to hear. It is a message that contains both *bad news* and **GOOD NEWS**. The *bad news* concerns you and the **GOOD NEWS** is about God. Let's consider the *bad news* first. The first half of the *bad news* is that you are a sinner. Actually, it says that everybody is a sinner! In the Bible book of Romans, it says that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). This means that everybody is guilty of having sinned. You, me and every other human being.

To have "*sinned*" means that we have "missed the mark", or fallen short of God's standard of what is right. Let's suppose that you and I were in Seattle and we had a contest to see who could throw a rock and hit Hawaii. You could probably throw your rock farther than I could mine but neither of us would even come close to hitting one of the Hawaiian Islands. We would "miss the mark." When the Bible says that "*all have sinned and fall short*", it means that we have all come short of God's perfect standard. In our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, we have not been perfect. Just like we could not throw a rock from Seattle to Hawaii, or even come close, we have not come anywhere close to meeting the standard that God requires to enter into Heaven. But the *bad news* gets even worse.

We are also told in the book of Romans that "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). "*Wages*" are what we earn by what we do. They are what we have "earned." If we agree to work for someone for \$75.00 a day, they would owe us \$75.00 when we finished a day's work. The Bible tells us that **by sinning we have earned death**. This means that we deserve to die and be separated from God forever. This death is what a righteous God is obligated to compensate us with. This death that we deserve is two-fold in nature. Every human being is subject to physical death because an inherited "sin nature" from Adam, the first man and father of the human race. The Bible tells us that "*through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and death through sin, thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*" (Romans 5:12). Since the creation was cursed because of Adam's sin, everyone is subject to death, but it gets worse. Each of us is subject to spiritual death as well. Spiritual death is being separated from God forever. This death is called the "second death." It is what we have earned by our personal sins, the sinful things or "works" that we do. This includes what we do in thought, word, or deed. This is all really bad news because after we die physically, there is a judgment that will come. The Scriptures say that "*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). The dead will be raised from the grave and judged for what they have done in this life. Those whose works are found to be sinful will be judged accordingly. Receiving what they deserve (*the wages of sin*); they will suffer the "second death" in the "Lake of Fire". This is a place of everlasting separation from God in a place of unquenchable fire and torment (see Revelation 20:10-15). This is all any of us deserve because we are all sinners by nature and in practice. This means that God, who is perfectly righteous and holy, must provide proper recompense to each of us for our works and all of us "*have sinned*" and the wages of our sin "*is death*." Again, this is all very *bad news*, but there is some good news. In fact, there is some really **GOOD NEWS!**

Since sin has placed a barrier between us and God that is impossible for us to cross in order for us to come to God on our own, God decided to provide a way for us to cross over by

crossing it Himself by sending His own Son in human form. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, “*died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and the He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*” (I Corinthians 15:3-4).

God loves us and He demonstrated that love “*in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). Each of us can claim this love for ourselves personally because Christ died for all of us, for each of us, and for every one of us. God Loves You!

Suppose you had a disease that was always terminal and that there was no known cure but, somehow, it was discovered that I was immune to the disease and you could be cured if all of your blood was replaced by my blood. Now, suppose that I agreed to give you all of my blood, but that there was no pure blood available to replace it at the time of the transfusion. Let’s also suppose that I decided to allow my blood to be transferred to your body while your blood was used to replace mine. In doing this, I would lose my immunity to the disease because the anti-bodies that fought it were in my blood and I would be infected with the disease because of your blood. If this could really happen,

***What would happen to me?**

***What would happen to you?**

***I WOULD DIE IN YOUR PLACE!**

***I WOULD DIE INSTEAD OF YOU!**

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ took the penalty that we deserved for sin, placed it upon Himself and **died in our place**. Three days later, Christ came back to life to prove that sin and death had been conquered and that His claims to be God in human flesh were true. This is really **GOOD NEWS**. But, just as the bad news got worse, the **GOOD NEWS** gets better! The really, really **GOOD NEWS** is that you, or anybody else, can be saved through faith in Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “*for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” *Grace* means “undeserved favor”; *saved* refers to being “delivered from sin’s penalty”, and *faith* means to “trust.”

And what are we to trust in? To be saved, we must trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. That we are to trust Him alone, apart from any effort of our own means that we must receive His salvation as a gift, a work of grace that we do not deserve. The **bad news** that “*the wages of sin is death*” is countered by the **GOOD NEWS** that “*the gift of God is eternal life*” (Romans 6:23).

Just as we might sit in a chair and trust it to hold us up through no effort on our part, we must rely on Jesus Christ completely to get to heaven. A true gift cannot be earned, bought, or demanded. It can only be received by the recipient from the giver.

People have many excuses for not trusting in Christ and receiving Him as their Savior. But, regardless what their reason is, pride is at the root. They just don’t want to admit that they have actually fallen short of God’s glory and think that somehow they can contribute something that will make them acceptable to God. No matter how many good things a person might do or

how strongly they believe that they do not need Jesus Christ to cleanse them of their sins, they will never be allowed into God's presence apart from faith in Christ.

Is there something keeping you from trusting Christ for the forgiveness of sins right now? Is there more than one reason you don't want to trust in Jesus Christ? Maybe you never thought about it in these terms. Perhaps you would like to make a list of the things holding you back. Think carefully about them. There is nothing more important than your need to trust Christ as Savior.

Would you like to tell God that you realize your personal need for forgiveness and are trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior? If you would, why not pray right now and tell him that you are trusting in His Son.

It is important to remember that it is not saying a prayer that saves you. It is trusting in Jesus Christ that saves you. Prayer is simply how we talk to God to acknowledge that we have placed our trust in Christ.

Simply tell God in your own words that you know that you are a sinner; that you know that you deserve punishment for your sins, that you believe that Christ died for you and rose from the dead; and that you have trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior.

If you truly believe these things and have placed your faith in Christ, the Bible teaches that God has saved you and given you the gift of eternal life. If this is so for you, thank God for forgiving you and giving you eternal life. Because it is Jesus Christ that has made you acceptable to God, it is good to honor Him by ending your prayer in His name.

If you are not used to praying, this is a good time to start because God is pleased when His children share with Him in prayer. Your prayer can be very simple. It can go something like this:

"Dear God, I know I'm a sinner and deserve to be punished. I believe that your Son, Jesus Christ died for me and rose from the dead. I trust in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness and the eternal life I now have. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen."

Again, remember a prayer does not cause God to save you; it is what you believe about Jesus Christ in your heart that causes Him to forgive you and give you eternal life.

What happened when you trusted Christ as your Savior? The Bible says that you were identified with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection through a "baptism" of the soul that the Holy Spirit performs when He comes into your life to seal and indwell you. The Bible tells us that it is "*by one Spirit are we all (believers) baptized into one Body (the Body of Christ), whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink of one Spirit*" (I Corinthians 12:13). Being identified with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the believer is sealed in Christ, forgiven of their sins, redeemed from the bondage of sin, reconciled with God, given eternal life, sanctified as God's own, and justified in God's sight by having Jesus Christ's righteousness imputed to them. These tremendous blessings of God's

grace are each a different aspect of the salvation that God has made available to the lost through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Each one is bestowed on the believer purely as an act of grace. No one could ever earn any one of these blessings, let alone all of them. But, being identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, the believer is given them all and much more.

The identification believers have with Jesus Christ is often looked at by them as something that is true, but has no practical application for today. They rejoice because they know that they have been forgiven and are on their way to heaven, but struggle with sin in the here and now because they do not understand what the significance of having the “life of Christ” imputed to them is in regards to their day-to-day life. The result is that they continue to struggle with their “flesh,” or old nature in their “own power.” Since the only power they have of their own is the flesh, they are defeated before they begin because they are pitting “self” against “self.” None of us is capable of living a Christ-like (Christian) life on our own. Only Christ Himself can do that. That is what the Apostle Paul was talking about when he told the Galatians; *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I but Christ liveth in me: and the life I now live in the flesh (in a physical body) I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). In other words, the life that we live as Christians is not to be lived in accord to the dictates of the Law as that is what killed us. We, as believers, have been crucified to both the Law and to sin. Being raised with Christ, we are to live a life of faith by which we allow Christ to manifest, or live, His life through us. The Apostle Paul also deals with this in Galatians chapter 5 where he contrasts “walking in the flesh” with “walking in the Spirit.” When we walk in the flesh, that is when we allow our old self to control us, only sinful works are produced (see Galatians 5:16-21). But, when we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, good fruit is produced (Galatians 5:22-25).

I am going to suggest some passages of Scriptures for you to read and study that I think might help you. I will list the passages below and give a brief comment on what each covers.

Romans 1:18-3:20; Condemns everyone as a sinner.

Romans 3:21-4:25; Explains that salvation is through faith.

Romans 5:1-21; Contrasts Adam’s sin and Christ’s righteousness.

Romans 6:1-7:25; Slow down and really give some time and thought to these two chapters. The baptism referred to in 6:1-4 is not a water rite performed by man, but the identifying baptism of the Holy Spirit that makes Christ’s death the believer’s death, Christ’s burial the believer’s burial, and Christ’s resurrection the believer’s resurrection. This is the baptism that saves and empowers the believer. Chapter 6 tells us why believers should live holy lives. Chapter 7 deals with the struggle every believer faces at some point in their life. None are immune because the flesh insists that it can win the victory on its own and reverts to some form of law-keeping. When we fail, which we always will, we become miserable. The way most deal with this is to try harder or just give up. After laying out the problem, Paul gives us the answer in the last two verses of this important chapter.

Romans 8:1-39; In this chapter the believer’s security “in Christ” is brought to the forefront of our thinking. We have complete assurance of our destiny “in Him.”

Romans 12:1-13:14; These two chapters lay out the basics of living the Christian life. Give some serious thought to 12:1-2 before going on to the rest of this passage. Only a “renewed mind” is able to enjoy the freedom we have in Christ.

Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians; After becoming familiar with the sections of Romans I have suggested, spend some time in these three letters. Read them several times before digging in for a detailed study. I recommend that you start with Philippians and then Ephesians and Colossians.

The key to meaningful Bible study, Bible study that changes our lives, is faith. When we find a truth in the Scriptures and believe that God can make it real in our lives, it will have a profound effect on how we think and act. Faith is a decision to trust God. Always keep in mind that every spiritual truth has a practical application. This general principle is expressed in II Corinthians where we read; *For the love of Christ constraineth us; if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again*” (II Corinthians 5:14-15). Here we are presented with the truth that because of what Jesus Christ did for us out of His love for us, it should motivate us to live for Him. And, learning more of who He is and what He is like, should also motivate us to serve Him, as should learning more about the undeserved blessings that we have “in Him” should motivate us the same way.

The redemption that God has made available to mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is offered as a gift to man. But, each man and woman must decide whether they will receive that gift or not. What took place on the cross is an objective fact of history. It took place at a certain time and at a certain place. But, no one receives any of the benefits provided for us through the cross until what was done there becomes subjective within them. The message of the cross confronts the human soul with the need to make a decision. We can either accept the message as true and by faith turn to God through Christ, or we can reject the message of Christ and harden our hearts toward God and His purposes. The question is, will we decide for Christ or against Him? There is no neutral ground, no in-between position that we can take when confronted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Each individual must decide for themselves. No one else can make the decision for us.

If we do choose Christ, then there is another choice that we are faced with each day, to believe God and trust Him to guide us through each day or to choose to ignore the power of the cross that enables us to live for Christ and set out on our own to win the victory over sin in our own power. A victory He has already won for us and desires for us to experience through faith in Him. It is when we walk in faith (trusting in His faithfulness to do for us what He has promised) that we experience peace and joy and have the sweetest fellowship with Him.