# The Forgiveness of Sins: Is That All There Is to the Salvation of the Soul?

Each of us, when we grew up in a church or found our way into one, was handed a pair of glasses with a denominational, doctrinal filter for reading the Bible. We studied the Bible through those glasses, and with their help we learned what we must do to be saved.

Most of us were taught that God has done everything for us, and that through faith in the sacrifice on the cross we obtain salvation, which consists in the forgiveness of sins. We were taught that **perfection of character** cannot be reached, and that no one can add anything to the work of salvation accomplished on the cross.

## The Results of This Belief

Many have been persuaded that after the new birth God is somewhere far away and does not get very involved in a person's life. Many understand the Holy Spirit's work in a person to be limited to a few outward things, such as speaking in tongues, a few miracles and prophecies, without the Holy Spirit being directly involved in transforming the person and perfecting his character.

So we are left to assume that God will make us perfect by some formula unknown to us, which He will apply after a person dies.

And this first part is roughly where most of us stay. We went to church, we had our own pew, we confessed our sins, we were baptized, we sang, we upheld the teachings of the church we belong to, we lived a more godly life, we visited the sick, and so we will enter the Kingdom of God.

We were taught that we will not get in because of what we have done, but because we have received the forgiveness of sins by grace, through faith in His sacrifice, since there is no one without sin.

Scripture tells us, however, that to reach the heavenly Kingdom, to be saved, the standard of the Kingdom of God makes very strict demands: no one who is imperfect, no one who is not like Him, can enter it. (Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:48; We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him. 1 John 3:2)

A person must have a credible answer to these demands of God.

So the question each of us must ask is this: What does God require of us? What is our part in sharing in salvation?

## God's Purpose: The Perfection of a Person's Character

Concerning this requirement, the teaching of the Holy Scriptures reveals the whole plan of God, whose goal is **the perfection of character**. This means that the sinner must be born again and grow as a disciple in the school of Christ, until he comes unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Not long after the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, alongside the teaching of the Lord and of the apostles **(the doctrine of the perfection of a person's character)**, Satan came with a false doctrine **(the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins)**, which offers salvation without much cost and limits it to the forgiveness of sins alone. **The teaching of Scripture** tells us that, besides the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice on the cross, we must also reach the perfection of our character, which requires the crucifixion of the flesh (putting off the old man) and the transformation of the person (putting on the new man, created after the image of God).

To reach the stature of Christ, the teaching of the Lord Jesus shows us that a person must trust fully in the Word of Christ, then repent, deny himself and enter into a covenant of discipleship whose goal is for the disciple to become like his Master. (It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. Matthew 10:25)

Anyone, however simple, understands that if someone reached the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, if he had His longsuffering, His love, His meekness… he would have free entrance into the Kingdom of God. This is a sure thing we can rely on, and it will give us full confidence in the day of judgment. Today there are very few people who accept and put into practice this doctrine of the perfection of a person's character. (Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Luke 13:23–24)

Looking more closely, we can easily see that most people choose to stay with a salvation that consists of the forgiveness of sins through faith in the sacrifice on the cross.

## The Doctrine of Salvation Reduced to the Forgiveness of Sins, and Its Various Forms

Satan, through his servants, came with a cheap teaching which says that God reduces salvation to the forgiveness of sins alone, because man cannot overcome sin. Within this false doctrine there are several offers by which you can supposedly be saved.

There is a first teaching, typical of the early centuries but still very much alive today. It is a cheap offer that Satan brings to the ignorant person who knows neither the Scriptures nor God's requirements. This teaching assures a person that salvation comes down to the forgiveness of sins alone, and that it is obtained by paying for indulgences, memorial offerings for the dead and rituals. (Here we find Catholicism and Orthodoxy.) The sinner who does not know the Word of God readily accepts this offer, because it lets him go on living in the flesh and guarantees him a cheap formula for obtaining salvation.

Another teaching, also cheap, persuades a person that he cannot overcome sin and that salvation is obtained "by faith alone", the price for the forgiveness of his unconquered sins having been paid by the Lord Jesus. (Here we find the Protestant denominations; see the Reformation of Luther, Calvin…)

This offer of Satan's persuades a person that perfection of character is not possible, and it too gives him a cheap formula for obtaining salvation. You believe in the sacrifice on the cross and you obtain a salvation that again comes down to the forgiveness of sins. (The Lord Jesus paid for it.)

There is also a third teaching, typical of recent centuries, which is closer to God's plan. It is aimed at the person who is not satisfied with these cheap offers and is looking for more.

This teaching says that salvation can be obtained through faith in the sacrifice on the cross and through repentance, followed by a form of godliness and a partial sanctification, but its goal is not self-denial, discipleship and reaching the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Here we find the evangelical movement: Baptists, Pentecostals and similar churches.)

In this doctrine we do find the new birth and a life of sanctification, but without victory over sin; here too the general conviction is that perfection of character is not possible in this life.

It is easy to see that repentance followed by incomplete sanctification (a form of godliness), without self-denial, which still leaves room for living in the flesh and never truly reaches completion, does not bring a person to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

This is the case of the person who still holds on to things of the flesh: greed, anger, idle talk, working off the books, slander, trips to the beach, wasting time on Facebook, YouTube…

It is quite clear that the person who embraces this teaching, in which sins remain unconquered, is forced to fall back on the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. This assumes that God will bring about perfection by some unknown formula, at the moment of death or at the resurrection.

We can see that Satan, in order to deceive the person who does not make salvation the goal of earnest searching, has used not only memorial offerings, indulgences and the like, but also the sacrifice on the cross, offering people a salvation that costs them very little.

So that we are not deceived, it is very important to examine the role of the sacrifice on the cross and to know what place the Lord's sacrifice has in the plan of salvation.

This article is taken from the booklet Transformed into the Image of Christ, available free online as a PDF.

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**Source:** *The Forgiveness of Sins: Is That All There Is to the Salvation of the Soul?* — Unmodified Word
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