

Chapter 2: The Biblical Teaching on 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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." John 3:16-18

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:8-10

How does man obtain salvation from God? This is undoubtedly the most important question in the whole universe. The answer to this question will determine the fate of the whole of humankind as well as that of the entire creation.

The first question to answer is this: When God offers sinful man the opportunity for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, shall He offer it in an easy manner or a difficult one? To state the question more clearly: Does God even care whether His creation, even sinful man, is redeemed?

If the answer to this question is yes, then we can safely assume (and demonstrate before Him) that God has completed everything necessary for the salvation of mankind. But if the answer is "No", then we must assume (and it must be obvious and demonstrable) that the Creator is making every effort to hide the way of salvation from humanity to the point of making it obscure and beyond recognition.

This chapter will discuss and prove that the biblical truth of salvation comes by the free gift of God. Later on, we will evaluate whether the Orthodox Church provides the correct answer to the question: "How can a person enter the Kingdom of Heaven?" The pages of God's Word, the Bible, describe numerous testimonies of God as infinite love. They describe God's revelation as the Majestic One, who even before the creation of the world, in His infinite omniscience, had insight into man's future depravity and developed the eternal plan of salvation. However, before we discuss further the issue of salvation, we need to answer this question: "Why do you need salvation in the first place?" Salvation from what?

Why Does Man Need Salvation?

To begin this study, it is critical to understand that the Biblical account in Genesis of the creation of life and matter in this world, including humanity, is not a mere myth or legend. Rather the account in Genesis of the creation describes actual history. This issue merits special attention because the majority of Serbs in our day, even though they call themselves "Christians", do not believe what the Bible says about creation. Instead, most

Serbs believe evolution to be true. While the reasons and implications of believing the literal account of creation in Genesis are very important, there is not enough room in this chapter to do the subject justice. The footnote below supplies some sources of reading material in the Serbo-Croatian language that demonstrates the veracity of the Bible and expose the false ideas propagated by evolutionists (e.g., today's version of "scientific atheism" that flourished under Communism). Christian scientists, including those with PhD's in various fields, detail the flawed assumptions of the theory of evolution and present evidence from science and history of God's special creation.¹

Since we accept the fact of divine creation, which is supported by numerous scientific proofs, it becomes much easier for us to believe in all of the other truths written in the Book of Books, the Bible. In the account of Moses, which was given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we read that the Lord created man as the crowning work of His creation:

*"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them... Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day."*²

God's original plan for its creation was to grant eternal life which He Himself possesses. The extraordinary diversity of plant and animal world, the billions of stars in the universe, and the angels who serve the Creator should drive people to worship and reverent fear before the Creator:

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.
In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun.*³

However, the Almighty did not want to subjugate forcefully the whole of His creation to Himself who formed it. So that His creatures made in His image could worship Him out of their own free will, God presented people with a decision. This decision involved one

¹ Some excellent books available in the Serbian language include: *Evolution or Creation* by Reinhard Junker and Siegfried Scherer, *What Do Rocks and Bones Prove?* by Karl Vilend, *The Collapse of Evolution* by Duane T. Gish, *Creation's Tiny Mystery* by Robert V. Gentry, *Genesis* by Ariel A. Roth, *Icons of Evolution* by Jonathan Wells, *The Biblical Flood* by Dr. Henry Morris and John Whitcomb (all published by the Center for Scientific Studies in Belgrade and related associations and publishing houses).

² Gen.1:26-7, 31.

³ Ps.19:1-4.

of two choices: eternal life with the Creator of all the beauty in the created world, or else willfully and deliberately choosing eternal damnation and separation from God.

*“And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The **tree of life** was also in the midst of the garden, and the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil**...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, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**”⁴*

Unfortunately, another personality dramatically entered the scene. The Lord Jesus Christ said this about him:

“And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”⁵

Here are some things the Old Testament prophets wrote:

*“How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning star!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!
For you have said in your heart:
‘I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.’
Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,
To the lowest depths of the Pit.”⁶*

“Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD:

*‘You were the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone was your covering:
The sardius, topaz, and diamond,
Beryl, onyx, and jasper,
Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.
The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes
Was prepared for you on the day you were created.*

⁴ Gen. 2:9, 16-7. Author’s emphasis.

⁵ Luke 10:18.

⁶ Is. 14:12-15. Author’s emphasis.

*You were the anointed cherub who covers;
I established you;
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.
You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created,
Till iniquity was found in you ...
Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;
I cast you to the earth...*⁷

Satan was a cherubim, an angelic being of superior power and intelligence. He was banished from God's throne because of his arrogant pretension to rival God. Along with Satan, the Holy God also expelled one third of the angels whom He had created for rebelling with Satan:

*“And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born... So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, **called the Devil and Satan**, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, **and his angels were cast out with him.**”⁸*

From envy and hatred that overflowed from his heart, Satan immediately rushed to destroy the one who was ordained in the beginning to become master of all creatures. The first man and his wife were caught by the enemy in the midst of the “decision process” before God. His lips had not yet touched the fruit from the tree of life. Satan quickly exploited the situation. He engaged the first humans in a very deceptive way by leading them to doubt God's generous intent with regard to their future:

*“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘**Did God really say**, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’
And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’
Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘**You will not surely die.** For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God**, knowing good and evil.’
So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.”⁹*

⁷ Ezek. 28:12-5, 17. Author's emphasis.

⁸ Rev. 12:3-4, 9. Author's emphasis.

⁹ Gen. 6:1-6. Author's emphasis.

Because of this frailty in human thinking, the devil, whom Christ the Lord called "a murderer from the beginning"¹⁰, he manipulated the first couple, along with billions of their offspring, onto the path that leads to eternal destruction. Through disobedience of the Lord's will by tasting the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, humanity not only gained mortality, that is, a corruptible nature, but he deserved death and condemnation consistent with God's warning.

However, God in His great mercy permitted the death of man only in a spiritual sense, which is manifested in a loss of intimately communion with Him. This spiritual death called "original sin" is passed on to all of Adam's descendants through inheritance. To this day, countless multitudes of human beings are born in a state of spiritual deadness, lacking communion with God and eternal life. Returning for a moment back to the Garden of Eden, the encounter with the Lord scared and confused our grandparents. Although the Word mandated that the transgressors of God's commandments should die, God saw fit to cover their shame and nakedness with the fur of animals which He sacrificed on their behalf.¹¹

God still did not complete this narrative of His mercy. On that occasion, the Lord foretold the fulfillment of his eternal plan, a plan of complete forgiveness of human guilt through the Savior to be born of woman (without the participation of man) who will vanquish Satan:

*"And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel."*¹²

From that moment onward, every day of history since ancient times brought humanity to the appearance of the divine Savior and the opportunity of salvation for human beings.

Human Depravity and God's Love

Through sin, man deserved death. Not only death, but man also earned a corrupt and fallible nature that is prone to disobeying the will of God and rebelling against everything that comes from His divine righteousness and holiness. This sinful nature has become part of all people, who suffer from its consequences by opposing the Lord and making themselves under God's wrath and eternal condemnation:

"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... For if the many died by the trespass of the one man... The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation... For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that

¹⁰ John 8:44.

¹¹ Gen. 3:7, 21.

¹² Gen. 6:15. Author's emphasis.

*one man... Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men... For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners...*¹³

The sinful nature is mentioned in the murder of Abel by his brother Cain.¹⁴ The apostle John comments on the reason Cain murdered his brother:

*“Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.”*¹⁵

Various forms of immorality (such as polygamy, malice, and others) appeared in human society. The Holy Scriptures elaborate on them:

*“Lamech married two women... Lamech said to his wives, ‘Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.’”*¹⁶

Lawlessness advanced further among the world’s population before the Great Flood. The Creator grieved deeply over the condition of His creatures who had become perverted and wicked. The sin of the people had become so great that the Lord decided to destroy every living thing. The only people whom God rescued from the disastrous of the flood were Noah and his family:

*“The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.’ **But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.***

This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, ‘I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth

¹³ Rom. 5:15, 16a, 17a, 18a, 19a.

¹⁴ Gen. 4:8.

¹⁵ 1 John 3:12.

¹⁶ Gen. 4:19, 23.

*is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.”*¹⁷

One hundred and twenty years after the Lord's warning, God sent the flood that destroyed all living creatures on the earth that were not on board Noah's ark. Perhaps over a billion ungodly creatures lost their lives.

One of you, readers, might wonder at this point whether God is truly gracious when He carried out such a terrible judgment? Why did He not simply close His eyes to their sin and forgive all? As mentioned earlier, God is gracious. However, His characteristics also include His absolute holiness. The Lord testifies to this throughout Scripture:

*“And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’”*¹⁸

Because God is holy, every sin from which a man does not want to repent must be punished. At the time of the flood, repentance was required of all human beings, *“who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water”*.¹⁹ However, as is the case today in the 21st Century, the warning of Noah's ark was ignored by most of the population, for they refused to listen to preachers of righteousness. This man of God believed in the word of God's future judgment:

*“From the time I brought your forefathers up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, ‘Obey me.’”*²⁰

God who is full of mercy desired the salvation of every person. However, He felt compelled to accept the free will of the majority that decided to refuse His kindness. Judgment eventually came.

God Is the Author of Salvation

It is important to emphasize the truth that salvation is completely God's work and does not come of human effort or work. The Bible reveals two apparently surprising and extreme points of knowledge about salvation. The Bible reveals God as a Being who is very interested in the salvation of His creation. It also shows people who have no interest in the Lord and refuse His plan of salvation. Even though God Almighty is exalted and self-sufficient, the evidence of the Bible demonstrates His great concern and love for all people that He created:

*“The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.’”*²¹

¹⁷ Gen. 6:5-13.

¹⁸ Is. 6:3.

¹⁹ 1 Pet. 3:20.

²⁰ Jer. 11:7.

“‘Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?’ declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?”²²

“For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!”²³

“...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”²⁴

*“‘Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; **he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.**”²⁵*

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Scripture not only depicts man as a sinner from birth, but also his body as belonging not to God, but under the authority of Satanic influence, and lacking even the slightest desire to seek the Lord and obey His will. Even man’s bodily organs are instruments devoted to evil:

*“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 wrath.”²⁶*

*“The LORD looks down from heaven
on the sons of men
**to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.***

*All have turned aside,
they have together become corrupt;*

²¹ Jer. 31:3. Author’s emphasis.

²² Eze. 18:23.

²³ Eze. 18:32.

²⁴ Mt. 5:45.

²⁵ Acts 14:15-17. Author’s emphasis.

²⁶ Eph. 2:1-3. The Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus and described to them the reality of their spiritual state before they became followers of Jesus Christ. Author’s emphasis.

*there is no one who does good,
not even one.*²⁷

“As it is written:

*‘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.’*

*‘Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit.’*

‘The poison of vipers is on their lips.’

‘Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.’

*‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;
ruin and misery mark their ways,
and the way of peace they do not know.’*

‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’²⁸

The Biblical view of God and his fallen creation is quite different from the depictions of various deities and people in other ancient polytheistic religions.

In these pagan religions, which differ significantly from the teachings of Christianity, their gods do not concern themselves with the fate of those who live on the earth and often mistreat them. Consequently, people devoted to these gods strive to appease them, even to the extreme of offering human sacrifices to them. Here are some examples from the Old Testament which describe the priests of pagan gods, including sacrificing human blood to the god Molech:

*“At noon Elijah began to taunt them. ‘Shout louder!’ he said. ‘Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they shouted louder and **slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.** Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.”²⁹*

*“He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and also made cast idols for worshipping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and **sacrificed his sons in the fire,** following the detestable ways of the nations the*

²⁷ Ps. 14:2-3. Author’s emphasis.

²⁸ Rom. 3:10-18. Author’s emphasis.

²⁹ 1 Ki. 18:27-9. Author’s emphasis.

LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.”³⁰

Thanks to his omniscience, God Almighty was not surprised by the fact that fallen man went astray without any desire to live a life that honors God. Being fully convinced that if He were to do nothing, all of mankind would be condemned with Satan to eternal punishment. However, God before the beginning of time predestined a number of people to salvation and eternal life. The Holy Scriptures give a clear testimony about this fact to us.

Predestined for Eternal Life

The apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians in a very clear manner describes the magnificent biblical truth of God's predestination of some people for salvation. Pay special attention to the bold text that follows. Because he takes special delight in communicating this truth, Paul writes in one breath the entire text and mentions several times the word “predestination”:³¹

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.***

*In him we were also chosen, **having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.**”³²*

Luke the Evangelist also writes about predestination in the Book of Acts:

³⁰ 2 Chr. 28:2-4. Author's emphasis.

³¹ This whole passage from Ephesians in the original Greek language is one long sentence.

³² Eph. 1:3-14. Author's emphasis.

*“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and **all who were appointed for eternal life believed.**”³³*

*“But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then **blot me out of the book you have written.**”³⁴*

*“All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all **whose names have not been written in the book of life** belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”³⁵*

*“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, **but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**”³⁶*

*“Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, **whose names are in the book of life.**”³⁷*

Of course, in order for Him to render this process of election to everlasting life in the Kingdom of Heaven effective, God from eternity had to find a way for the forgiveness of sins of those whom He predestined. Because the sin of humanity was so grave in His eyes, He chose for Himself the most painful solution. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, complied with the will of his heavenly Father to take upon Himself the curse and punishment as a result of the sins of the world. By obeying His Father, Jesus offered God's plan of salvation:

*“Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.’ Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is **written about me in the scroll—** I have come to do your will, O God.’”³⁸*

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”³⁹

When the apostle Peter speaks of Christ's sacrifice on the cross at Calvary, he explains that His crucifixion was planned in eternity:

³³ Acts 13:48. Author's emphasis.

³⁴ Ex. 32:32. Author's emphasis.

³⁵ Rev. 13:8. Author's emphasis.

³⁶ Luke 10:20. Author's emphasis.

³⁷ Phil. 4:3. Author's emphasis.

³⁸ Heb. 10:5-7. Author's emphasis.

³⁹ John 6:38.

*“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. **He was chosen before the creation of the world**, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.”⁴⁰*

Luke the Evangelist concurs with Peter’s statement:

*“Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did **what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.**”⁴¹*

No true Christian loyal to the Gospel of Christ would never add anything else to this magnificent plan of God with regard to Christ's perfect sacrifice and His election of many souls to His wonderful Kingdom. Instead, true believers sing to the Lord with admiration for His amazing grace, for He deserves thanks and glory. The Apostle Paul said:

*“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
'Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?'
'Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?'
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.”⁴²*

Salvation by Faith in the Old Testament

When we discuss salvation in this period, we include the actions of God over a long history of roughly four thousand years, spanning the Biblical chronology from the creation of the world to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The words of the Apostle Paul, which emphasize predestination, begin our proof that God always saved some people and granted them eternal life solely on the basis of their faith and response to His calling them to repentance. God’s inspired servant explains further:

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, **who have been called according to his purpose.** For those God **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

⁴⁰ 1 Pet. 1:18-20. Author’s emphasis.

⁴¹ Acts 4:27-8. Author’s emphasis.

⁴² Rom. 11:33-6. Author’s emphasis.

*And those he **predestined**, he also **called**; those he called, he also **justified**; those he justified, he also **glorified**.*⁴³

Therefore, the apostle mentions the people that God knew in advance and predestined, and whom He later in their life called, justified and glorified.⁴⁴ Since we have already talked about the Lord's omniscience and predestination, we now will focus on God's calling and man's response to it, thus comprising the sinner's justification in Christ.

Salvation by Faith (57)

When we talked about the global population before the Flood that rejected God, we noticed that only eight people in the family of Noah survived the Great Flood. Although only a few were found righteous at the time of the Flood, the history before the Flood reveals several people who found grace from God. Scripture tells us about the righteous Abel and Enoch. Beyond a doubt, the two of them were chosen by God and called to serve him. Earlier we read that no person in and of himself seeks the Lord.⁴⁵ This knowledge brings us to various questions concerning the salvation of Abel, Enoch, and Noah. How were they saved and accepted by God? Did they earn their salvation based on their own works that pleased God, or by another way? The Book of Books says this:

*“And after he became the father of Methuselah, **Enoch walked with God** 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away... But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and **he walked with God**.”*⁴⁶

One who has some understanding of the idea and meaning of Scripture could easily arrive at the conclusion that these verses support the view that man earns salvation from God through his own obedience and righteousness. However, one should never interpret certain texts in the Bible apart from the total context of God's Word. In order to get the full picture regarding this question, one needs to turn the page to the Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament:

*“**By faith** Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. **By faith** Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists*

⁴³ Rom. 8:28-30. Author's emphasis.

⁴⁴ In a spiritual sense, these people would be made to stand with Christ in Heaven. See Eph. 1:3 and Col. 1:13.

⁴⁵ Ps. 14:3

⁴⁶ Gen. 5:22-4, 6:8-9. Author's emphasis.

*and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. **By faith** Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”⁴⁷*

⁴⁷ Heb. 11:4-7. Author’s emphasis.

What Is Saving Faith?

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”⁴⁸

Many Serbs’ idea of “faith” does not correspond to what the verse above describes. The Scriptures do not equate faith with religious traditions or customs. Neither does faith consist of reverence for ancestors who died long ago and were considered to be founders of national churches.

The Scriptures define faith as when a saved sinner has firm conviction of that which God reveals to him. None of us in the 21st Century has actually seen the events from the distant past as described in the Bible. However, New Testament believers reading the Old Testament had firm confidence in the reliability of the Biblical accounts, even though they themselves did not witness these events. The Apostle Peter describes the fruits of their saving faith:

*“These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. **Though you have not seen him**, you love him; and **even though you do not see him now**, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy... ”⁴⁹*

According to Peter’s preaching, they received the salvation of their souls by believing in Christ, Whom they did not see with their own physical eyes, and holding firm confidence in His redemptive death as described in the Gospel. However, so that someone would not be in error by believing he believes “firmly in God”, yet at the same time, he lives and acts contrary to His Will (though he considers himself “saved by faith”), it is critical to reflect on this passage:

*“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?... In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. **You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.** You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”⁵⁰*

James responds to the contention of people that merely possessing intellectual faith in God’s existence entitles them to salvation and the right to be called Christians just like true believers in Christ. James answers that the logical outcome of true faith results in daily rejection of sins and fruit of righteous deeds. (Righteous deeds are the result of salvation through saving faith, not the cause of salvation.) Mere intellectual belief that

⁴⁸ Heb. 11:1.

⁴⁹ 1 Pet. 1:7-8. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁰ Ja. 2:14, 17-20, 26. Author’s emphasis.

God exists is not sufficient for salvation. Even the Devil himself believes this, yet he still opposes God.

By demonstrating this issue, it is obvious that James is not addressing true brothers and sisters in the faith (nor is he advocating salvation by good works, which would completely contradict various other areas of the Bible). When he addresses Christians, James speaks to them with great care: "Dear brethren."⁵¹

On the other hand, however, James says, "But if someone says..."⁵², he clearly addresses a situation of someone who is not a Christian brother, but rather an unbeliever who claims that God exists, yet demonstrates no other fruits of the Christian faith. Such a person has obviously not understood or accepted actual saving faith. Precisely for this reason, James reveals such to be empty of true faith in Christ.

Faith possessed by all the people of God is precisely that which yields fruit and works that are consistent with His will. However, neither faith nor righteous works themselves originate from people but rather come from their merciful God.⁵³ This fact gets lost by sinful people caught up in trying to do good deeds, yet the apostles Peter and Paul affirm this truth in their epistles.

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ **have received a faith as precious as ours**: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness... Through these **He has given us** his very great and precious promises..."⁵⁴

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance **with the measure of faith God has given you.**"⁵⁵

In this way, we explained how some of the famous Biblical figures came to salvation through faith. The next section will examine this theme in God's Word in the notable life of one of the heroes of the faith of the Old Testament: Abraham.

The Calling and Justification of Abraham

Abraham is one of the most famous figures of the Old Testament and, in fact, the entire Bible. In order to understand the Biblical teachings on salvation, one must study his example and living relationship. Abraham is a premier example of salvation by faith, in the first part of God's inspired Words that demonstrates God's calling and justification of sinners.

⁵¹ See James 1:2, 16, 19, 2:1, 5, 14, 3:1, 12, 5:19.

⁵² Ja. 2:18

⁵³ See Paul's comments in Romans 8.

⁵⁴ 2 Pet. 1:1-3. Author's emphasis.

⁵⁵ Rom. 12:1-3. Author's emphasis.

Who Was Abraham?

According to biblical chronology, Abraham was born in the tenth generation some 292 years after the Great Flood. He came from the line of Noah through Shem. In other words, he was a member of the Semitic tribes. Abraham was born when Noah was 892 years old. (Noah lived for 950 years.) This fact reveals that Abraham had the possible opportunity to personally meet Noah, an extraordinary personality.

However, when we read the account of Moses about Abraham when he was 75 years old, it seems that we would be incorrect to assume that Abraham had a serious interest in spiritual truth. Abraham lived with family, including his parents, brothers, and half-sister who had become his wife, in the province of the Chaldeans.⁵⁶ His ancestors settled in this area after God scattered the peoples away from the Tower of Babel due to their rebellion against God and practice of idolatry. Some of these idolaters settled near the area near the Persian Gulf and founded the settlement of Ur. A man named Terah was born there. We learn that Ur along with the city of Haran (over a thousand miles away) were centers for idol worship of a triad of gods: the god of the moon, the god of the sun, and the queen of heaven (Nanna, Utu and Inanna).⁵⁷ Also, there is a sacrificial altar called a “Ziggurat” which resembles a pyramid. Its purpose was for people like Abraham to offer sacrifices to these false idols.

It seems strange that people only 200 years after the Great Flood had fallen away from God and returned to sinful idolatry, sin that provoked God to send the Great Flood that wiped out virtually all of mankind. What seems even more stunning is that Noah and his sons were still alive when the tower of Babel and the founding of Ur and other cities took place. Remember that Shem lived 500 years after the Great Flood. In spite of the fact that his descendants would have had access to Noah and his family whom God spared during the Great Flood, hardly anyone cared to listen to their preaching about the dangers of ungodly living.⁵⁸ These generations after the Flood had a number of eyewitnesses who could attest to the holiness, righteousness, and wrath of God against sin. (60)

In spite of such clear warnings, most people chose to walk without God. The Apostle Paul describes them:

*“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***

⁵⁶ Gen. 11:31.

⁵⁷ While we would not endorse all the views on these sites, there could be some useful background information for the reader on the culture of Ur. See <http://www.crystalinks.com/sumergods.html> for descriptions. See also the corruption of human sacrifice out of which the Lord saved Abram, later Abraham: <http://gallery.sjsu.edu/sacrifice/sumerians.html>. (Translator’s note)

⁵⁸ The ancient Babylonian (Sumerian) *Epic of Gilgamesh* recounts the story of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, a city known for the temple of the goddess Inanna. He traveled to the man named Ut-Napishtim (the Biblical Noah) who declared the arrival of the flood according to “the gods”. The aforementioned UT-Napištim immortality allegedly granted to him by the gods. This epic is a legendary story that contains some actual events which coincide with the Biblical account of the Great Flood that happened in Noah’s time. Mircea Eliade, *A Guide Through the World of Religion*, (People’s Books, Alpha: 1996), 225-226.

*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. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.”*⁵⁹

During the time of Abraham, it is obvious that the world population worshiped false gods. We have no reason to doubt that he and all his relatives were idolaters like other people. (The name "Abraham" is translated either as “exalted father” or “father of the high places” – followers of pagan religions built common altars to their gods on high places, such as hills etc.)⁶⁰ Their loyalty to the false gods they worshiped and the strong domination of pagan religion over them is demonstrated in their selection of a new home after departing Ur:

*“Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.”*⁶¹

Although we do not know their motive for leaving their hometown and moving to the land inhabited by the members of the tribe of Canaan (the Canaanites), we can assume that they were searching for areas suitable for living and grazing their animals. At that time, the world was not densely populated such that Terah and his family could find space far from human settlements. Their ultimate destination was Haran, where they arrived after long months of travel. It was quite natural for newcomers to this place to continue to exercise the religion to which they were accustomed. The Book of Joshua reports on the manner of their religion:

*“Joshua said to all the people, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac...’”*⁶²

⁵⁹ Romans 1:18-25. Author’s emphasis.

⁶⁰ See Num. 33:22, 1 Kings 22:44, and 2 Chr. 17:6.

⁶¹ Gen. 11:31-2.

⁶² Josh. 24:2-3. Author’s emphasis.

God Calls Abraham to Leave

"The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

*"I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.*

*I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and **all peoples on earth**
will be blessed through you."*

So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran."⁶³

Although even before the Creation of the world God knew beforehand Abraham was predestined for eternal life, the fact is that Abraham himself had no idea until God actually called him. (No person really knows God is calling him until the moment of his calling and repentance before God. We become aware of this reality through God's Holy Scriptures.)

In Abraham's case, his encounter with God came quite unexpectedly. Abraham was over eighty five years old, the time which was predetermined to be that when he heard God's voice. Abraham's entire life was full of religion, yet this was the first time in his life to have an encounter with a true Deity. What is more, this Deity was completely unknown to Abraham. However, it is obvious that God who invited Abraham knew him intimately. As a consequence of the faith God gave Abraham, Abraham was able to respond to the invitation that God pronounced. The Book of Hebrews explains:

*"**By faith** Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. **By faith** he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country..."⁶⁴*

In the next twenty-five years, the Almighty appeared to Abraham on several occasions.⁶⁵ God answered Abraham by promising him countless descendants, despite the fact that his wife was barren her entire life. Sarah's menstrual periods had ceased long ago.⁶⁶ She and her husband had long ago given up on hope for any offspring. Nevertheless, Abraham through time gained a deeper intimacy with God that He could fulfill His promise. For that reason, his faith grew stronger. Abraham believed that God

⁶³ Gen. 12:1-4. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁴ Heb. 11:8-9. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁵ See Gen. chapters 15, 17, and 18.

⁶⁶ See Gen. 18:11.

could do what other people saw as impossible. He became convinced that God could give him seed in accordance with His promise:

*“He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Abram **believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.**”⁶⁷*

The text above tells us much more than the mere fact that Abraham believed that he would receive what he had desired for over fifty years. The text states that the Lord **imputed righteousness to Abraham by faith**. The Apostle Paul writes the following:

*“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and **gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”**”⁶⁸*

***“Those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified...”**⁶⁹*

Without any doubt, as the Bible affirms, before God called him to come out from Haran, Abraham was just like everyone else: he was wicked. Abraham was given over to religious idolatry under which bondage he lived. Just like other members of his family, Abraham had been set on the path of eternal destruction, doing works of lawlessness inspired by the evil one.

The notion of "justification" means the existence of previous guilt. There is nothing that could force someone to seek "justification" lest that person had previously done something wrong, or in other words, he had sinned. Abraham's guilt was obvious. Decades of living in sin just could not be erased. God needed to bring this man to a condition in which He would be fully satisfied with Abraham. The Lord could not rely merely on a gradual "correction" in the behavior and ways of living of the former inhabitant of Haran. In fact, God never chose to save man in that manner. In accordance with his eternal plan, God graciously chose to forgive the sins of Abraham all at once so that he would be declared righteous on the basis of his strong faith:

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

⁶⁷ Gen. 15:5-6. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁸ Rom. 4:18-22. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁹ Rom. 8:30.

*Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness **apart from works**:*

"Blessed are they

whose transgressions are forgiven,

whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man

whose sin the Lord will never count against him."'⁷⁰

The apostle Paul in this section makes himself more than clear. He stresses that Abraham came to the justification not through his efforts and works that pleased God. Rather, Abraham's belief and trust in God was declared as his justification. At a time when his life reached the peak of sinfulness (just as the sins of other people whom God has predestined), Abraham was completely justified, declared completely innocent of his sin and without guilt. Such justification came about only by the amazing grace of God. Abraham received this justification on the basis of the vicarious sacrifice that for him was predestined before the beginning of time.

What Was the Result of Abraham's Justification?

Daily sanctification from God is the logical consequence for each individual who is justified by faith. Such was the case for Abraham. From the first time the Lord met him, until the end of his life, Abraham lived one hundred more years.⁷¹ During this time, Abraham grew in his understanding of and relationship with God and His will. Abraham's first steps with God were immature. He faced the temptation to lie and did so.⁷² He led a detachment of warriors and fought against the army that captured his nephew Lot.⁷³ He complied with his wife's advice and conceived a child with her maid Hagar, even though it was contrary to God's plan and promises given to him.⁷⁴ All of Abraham's "transgressions" occurred during the ten years since the first appearance of the Lord,⁷⁵ which gives us the knowledge that Abraham's faith grew very slowly. However, even without the benefit of a devotional book to acquire more knowledge of God, Abraham passing through life and learned spiritual lessons in a practical way.

So, in the last years of his life, God gave his barren wife, Sarah, a son. Yet, God chose to test Abraham in his faith and trust in Him as the Almighty. The Lord commanded Abraham with his promised son, Isaac, to travel to the land of afflictions, a remote wilderness of several days' journey, in order to offer him as a sacrifice:

⁷⁰ Rom. 4:1-8. Author's emphasis.

⁷¹ Abraham lived to be 175 years old. See Gen. 12:4 and 25:7.

⁷² See Gen. 12:12-20.

⁷³ See Gen. 14.

⁷⁴ See Gen. 16.

⁷⁵ See Gen. 16:3.

*“Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.” Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. **Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.**”⁷⁶*

This chapter describes a miraculous episode in the life of Abraham. It does not mention the inner conflict within the old man’s heart, nor does he question the Lord’s commandment. It is certain that Abraham struggled within his mind about what good this work would bring, especially about how God would fulfill His promise to bring about many descendants through Isaac if he were killed. Nonetheless, Abraham was obedient all the way to his final destination:

*“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” **Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.**”⁷⁷*

His years of experience in devotion to living and trusting God taught Abraham that the will and counsel of the Lord is always perfect. The Lord Jesus Christ said:

*“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; **anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.**”⁷⁸*

Abraham knew that. At the moment he raised the knife to kill the son promised to him, and the pain welled in his heart, he heard the call:

“But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.

⁷⁶ Gen. 22:1-10. Author’s emphasis.

⁷⁷ Heb. 11:17-19. Author’s emphasis.

⁷⁸ Mt. 10:37. Author’s emphasis.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."⁷⁹

This Abraham, who was at first a depraved and lost pagan, then turned into a hero of the Christian faith by God, became one of the most famous people of the Bible only because of God's sovereign will and election. By choosing and justifying this man, God brought him into His heavenly glory⁸⁰ and made him an example of justification by faith for others in future generations.

However, let us briefly examine the statement that James handed down in his epistle concerning the justification of Abraham. The Orthodox Church incorrectly misinterprets this issue because it ignores the doctrine of salvation taught in the whole Bible.⁸¹ Here is the verse that Orthodox readers misunderstand:

*"Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "**Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,**" and he was called God's friend. **You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone...** As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."⁸²*

As stated in an earlier chapter, the texts of the Holy Scriptures must never be interpreted outside the context of the entire Word of God. The Bible never contradicts itself. Therefore, careful examination of the second chapter of the Epistle of James reveals that James declares that salvation before God requires mere intellectual faith in His existence with a concurrent lack of desire to obey God's will. Each person is saved by a faith that desires to do what the Lord commanded.

The writer of the epistle states that righteous deeds before God show evidence of justification by faith. Abraham's "faith in God" would have been dead if he were to have

⁷⁹ Gen. 22:11-18. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁰ See Lk. 16:22-31.

⁸¹ See 2 Pet. 3:15-16.

⁸² Ja. 2:21-24, 26. Author's emphasis.

resisted God's commandments, for that would have meant he in reality did not know the Lord nor believed in Who He is.

Abraham's conversion and justification by faith, of which James speaks in verse 23, occurred before Abraham's 86th birthday.⁸³ However, Abraham's "justification as revealed by works" took place only after Abraham had turned 100 years old and after Isaac had become a young man. The implication is that Abraham's "works of justification" occurred at least 15 years after God declared him to be righteous through faith. (This means that after a long period of time, Abraham grew enough spiritually in his faith and unlimited confidence in God to perform this magnificent act.)

Deeds that please God always accompany saving faith. However, they do not constitute a requirement for salvation as further study of this topic will demonstrate.

Justification by Faith in the Time of the Law

After a long period of time which some call the "Age of Conscience", people lived without the special revelation of God through the written word. Then the time of the written Law arrived. This era in Biblical history began when God gave to Moses in writing His ten commandments on Mount Sinai.⁸⁴ After His liberation of the people of Israel from centuries of Egyptian bondage, the Lord God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, officially declared them to be His people in accordance with the previous promise given to Abraham, their forefather:⁸⁵

*"Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and **brought you to myself**. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations **you will be my treasured possession**. Although the whole earth is mine, **you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."*⁸⁶

In this same time, the Lord also revealed His laws to Jacob's descendants and gave them the knowledge that He would bless them for life if they would obey Him:

*"The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: '**I am the LORD your God**. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. **I am the LORD***

⁸³ See Gen. 15:5-5, 16:1-3, 16.

⁸⁴ See Gen. 20.

⁸⁵ See Gen. 22.

⁸⁶ Exod. 19:3-6. Author's emphasis. The term "sons of Israel" refers to the descendants of Jacob, Abraham's grandson and Isaac's son. God gave Jacob another name "Israel", which means "one who has struggled with God." See *Bible Reference Library: People and Places in the Bible*, (Barbour Books, New Jersey: 1987) and Gen. 32:24-30. Today's Israel (the Jews) are physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.⁸⁷

The Law which the Lord gave the Israelites through Moses was absolutely perfect. Jacob's descendants, however, like all the other people before them, were sinful people who were unable to obey these laws perfectly. However, the purpose of the Law was precisely this: on the one hand, every human being is an image of God's perfection, but on the other hand, no person could ever achieve the perfection that God's Law required, regardless of his efforts.

The Apostle Paul, who in life before conversion to Christ was zealous with regard to upholding all the requirements of the Law, eventually arrived at this conclusion:

*"So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good... **We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin...** So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, **evil is right there with me.** For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, **waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.** What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"*⁸⁸

The purpose of the Law was to affirm this eternal truth: man is unable to be saved by God with his own good works, but rather through faith alone in the redemptive vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ. After he became a Christian and understood the true meaning of the Law, the very same Apostle Paul said the following:

*"Now we know that **whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.** Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; **rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.**"*⁸⁹

*"[We]know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."*⁹⁰

*"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." **Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."** The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."... Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would*

⁸⁷ Lev. 18:1-5. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁸ Rom. 7:12, 14, 21-24. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁹ Rom. 3:19-20. Author's emphasis.

⁹⁰ Gal. 2:16. Author's emphasis.

*certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, **being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.***"⁹¹

Throughout the history of the Old Testament "Age of Law", the Israelites never could meet the righteous standards of God no matter how hard they tried. Consequently, they were forced to make sacrifices every single day on account of their sins, which the LORD prescribed precisely for this reason:

*"Say to them: 'This is the offering made by fire that you are to present to the LORD : two lambs a year old **without defect, as a regular burnt offering each day.**'"*⁹²

The New Testament writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews confirms the above practice, which unfortunately did not bring lasting results:

*"Every priest **stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins...**"*⁹³

By ordaining the offering of sacrificial animals for violating the provisions of the law, God through the centuries showed the Israelites that the only way to forgiveness and justification came through faith in the blood shed by the ultimate perfect sacrifice - Jesus Christ.

Salvation by Faith in the Time of the New Testament

The books of the New Testament, which describe the life and teachings of the Savior and his Apostles, tell us much more about salvation by faith than do the Old Testament writings. While God's way of salvation in the Old Testament is quite clear, studying this topic through the context of the New Testament yields a complete spiritual perspective. The concept of salvation is presented so clearly by Christ's disciples that it is impossible for a sincere reader of the Bible to draw any other conclusion beyond that which we will report here. The following discussion will demonstrate once again that salvation from God is one of the most important themes of the Bible.

Christ: the Lamb of God

*"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*⁹⁴

We have previously pointed out the fact that the era of the Old Testament lasted until the death and resurrection of Christ from the dead. The practice introduced by the Mosaic Law given by God prescribed the offering of animal sacrifices for sin. This practice was

⁹¹ Gal. 3:10-12, 21-22. Author's emphasis.

⁹² Num. 28:3. Author's emphasis.

⁹³ Heb. 10:11 (New American Standard Bible). Author's emphasis.

⁹⁴ Jn. 1:29.

still carried out every day in Israel including the time when Jesus lived in Nazareth. However, about 1500 years of such laws, and the last river flowed with the shed blood of innocent animals, the time arrived when one sacrifice once and for all would be accepted. In fact, all Old Testament sacrifices were only typological images that alluded to the one sacrifice of Christ that would make forgiveness of human sin and guilt possible.

*“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because **it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins**. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.’ ” First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second.”⁹⁵*

In the epistles of First Peter⁹⁶ and Revelation, Jesus Christ is described as the lamb slaughtered for the sins of the whole world:

*“Then I saw **a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain**, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth... And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, **because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.**”⁹⁷*

These texts affirm Christ as the one and only true sacrifice. We arrive at the conclusion that Old Testament believers were saved by faith in Jesus sacrifice on Calvary just as New Testament believers are saved today. The only difference is that Old Testament believers had to offer sacrifices as they looked in faith to the future for the perfect sacrifice to come. In contrast, New Testament believers look back into the past and observe in a spiritual sense Christ crucified and suffering for their sins.

⁹⁵ Heb. 10:1-9. Author’s emphasis.

⁹⁶ 1 Pet. 1:19-20.

⁹⁷ Rev. 5:6, 9-10. Author’s emphasis.

Christ Fulfilled the Strict Provisions of the Law of God

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”⁹⁸

This declaration by the Lord Jesus Christ who came to fulfill the law not only was a simple wish of heartfelt pious Jews of that time. It was an extraordinary and bold statement! At last arrived the long-awaited Savior of Whom many prophets had foretold, the One to Whom the entire meaning of the Old Testament pointed. Christ embodied the full meaning of the word "Christ" in his personality and his combined role as prophet, priest, and King. He also combined the roles of high priest and victim:

*“When Christ came as **high priest** of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all **by his own blood**, having obtained eternal redemption.”⁹⁹*

Jesus Christ fulfilled hundreds of prophecies that spoke of him, starting from that which was stated in the Garden of Eden. He was the Messiah of God, the most important figure ever born. Christ's perfect fulfillment of the Law from his side meant not only that he lived a sinless life, but He also took upon Himself the penalty of sin and the curse of the law in all its fullest dimensions:

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”¹⁰⁰

Jesus encountered great mental agony and mortal suffering, even to the point of sweating blood out of His forehead, in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew He would have to take upon Himself the penalty for the incredible filth and lawlessness of human depravity. Nevertheless, He persevered. God allowed the soldiers to arrest, insult, and beat Jesus. He was finally given over to the crazed mobs who sought Christ's death. The Roman soldiers arranged for Him to be killed by crucifixion. The Sinless One hung on the cross for six hours, thus fulfilling the last of the unfulfilled prophecies about Himself as recorded in the Old Testament:

*“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. **But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,***

⁹⁸ Mt. 5:17-18.

⁹⁹ Heb. 9:11-12. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ Gal. 3:13.

*and by his wounds we are healed... Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though **the LORD makes his life a guilt offering**... he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For **he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**”¹⁰¹*

The Apostle Paul recognized the amazing significance of the sacrifice of the Lord as the perfect exchange. Jesus Christ became the sin of humankind that God the Father punished in exchange for all people who accept Christ as their Savior by faith become identified with God's perfect righteousness:

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”¹⁰²

The unbounded suffering by the Son by the abandonment of His Father and His death satisfied divine justice. The clearest sign that Christ fully satisfied His work to redeem humankind consisted of His resurrection from the dead, after which He ascended into heaven and sat on the right side of the throne of the All High God.

The Magnificent Implications of Christ's Vicarious Sacrifice

The situation in which New Testament believers find themselves is simply incredible. The Holy Scriptures reveal that:

1. Every Christian is called perfectly righteous in the sight of God.

*“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference...**”¹⁰³*

2. To every Christian is imputed the righteousness of God.

*“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that **in him we might become the righteousness of God.**”¹⁰⁴*

3. Every Christian is made perfect in the sight of God.

“And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

4. Every Christian has peace with God.

¹⁰¹ Isaiah 53:3-5, 10, 12. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰² 2 Cor. 5:21.

¹⁰³ Rom. 3:21-22. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ 2 Cor. 5:21. Author's emphasis.

*“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access **by faith** into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”¹⁰⁵*

5. Every Christian is born of God and becomes God’s child.

*“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, **he gave the right to become children of God.**”¹⁰⁶*

*“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that **we should be called children of God!** And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are **children of God**, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”¹⁰⁷*

6. Every Christian receives the Spirit of adoption.

*“Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received **the Spirit of sonship**. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”¹⁰⁸*

*“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might **receive the adoption as sons**. And because **you are sons**, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”¹⁰⁹*

7. Every Christian becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit.

*“Or do you not know that **your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”¹¹⁰*

*“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us **the Spirit in our hearts** as a guarantee.”¹¹¹*

8. Every Christian becomes a dwelling place for the Father and the Son.

*“Jesus replied, ‘If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and **we will come to him and make our home with him.**’”¹¹²*

¹⁰⁵ Rom. 5:1-2. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁶ Jn. 1:12. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ 1 Jn. 3:1-2. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ Rom. 8:14-16. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ Gal. 4:4-6. New King James Version. Author’s emphasis.

¹¹⁰ 1 Cor. 6:19. Author’s emphasis.

¹¹¹ 2 Cor. 1:21-2. Author’s emphasis.

9. Every Christian is a brother or sister of Jesus Christ.

*“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them **brothers**.”*¹¹³

*“Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is **my brother and sister and mother**.’”*¹¹⁴

10. Jesus and the Holy Spirit pray for every Christian.

*“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but **the Spirit himself intercedes for us** with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because **the Spirit intercedes** for the saints in accordance with God's will.”*¹¹⁵

*“...But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives **to intercede for them**.”*¹¹⁶

11. Every Christian enjoys the love of God.

*“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, **will be able to separate us from the love of God** that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*¹¹⁷

12. Every Christian enjoys the protection of God.

*“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and He delivers them... The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry... A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all.”*¹¹⁸

*“What, then, shall we say in response to this? **If God is for us, who can be against us?** He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things.”*¹¹⁹

¹¹² Jn. 14:23. Author's emphasis.

¹¹³ Heb. 2:11. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁴ Mt. 12:49-50. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁵ Rom. 8:26-7. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁶ Heb. 7:24-5. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁷ Rom. 8:38-9. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁸ Ps. 34:7, 15, 19.

¹¹⁹ Rom. 8:31-2. Author's emphasis.

Conclusion

All of these privileges, and many others that are not presented here, are gifts that only God can bestow through a person's faith in Jesus Christ the Savior. Such faith is not a meritorious work by that person. God's Scriptures emphasize this fact very clearly.

Now that we have studied in some detail the teachings of the infallible Word of God about this most important doctrine of salvation, we will consider in the following chapter what Eastern Orthodoxy teaches on the same topic. It will not take much time or effort to notice the huge gap between the doctrine derived from the Gospel of Christ versus the traditions taught by the "Holy Fathers" of the Eastern Church.