

DOCTRINE OF SALVATION – Part 3

Many people have questions about salvation and the genuineness of their conversion. The following examples/illustrations of conversions may help our understanding.

1. **Heartfelt misery, crisis, personal deliverance, and thanksgiving.** Sitting at the back of an Airbus 380 aircraft, a man observed the reactions of his fellow passengers to the emergency procedure demonstration conducted by the flight attendants. Most people are bored, nonchalant, indifferent, not paying attention, sleeping, reading their newspapers, watching videos or playing video games. Suppose halfway through the flight, at a cruising altitude of 30,000 feet, the right engine of the aircraft caught fire. The passenger saw the flames. They heard the pop sound. They felt the plane shuddered and became unsteady, a sense of panic rose within each heart, and then they heard the agitated worried voice of the pilot calling out emergency instructions, “Cabin crew prepare for emergency landing!” The same messengers speak the same message, but now everyone listens to instructions from the flight attendants because their life and safety depends on it. It’s a real crisis. The misery is real. Would people still be playing video games, reading newspapers, or watching the latest movie? Perhaps they would replay the movies of their lives before their eyes. Some may plead with God: “I’m too young to die, please let me live. If you will let me live, I’ll do whatever you want me to do; I’ll believe/live differently/be serious about the Christian faith/I will serve you.” Some would be praying for God’s mercy. Some would start crying out to God for forgiveness of sins. Some regret they had not loved their spouse or children enough, because they had been too preoccupied with their work and striving to get rich. The first time, no one experienced a real need for the message; while the second time, they were convinced of their misery and need for deliverance. The message of deliverance in Jesus Christ, presented by His messengers can be regarded as boring by people who have never experienced their spiritual misery because they are not in a desperate need for delivery from hell. But when death was imminent, the heartfelt experience of their misery changed dramatically. If the pilot managed to land the plane successfully, everyone on the flight clapped and hugged the flight attendants and pilot, with tears in their eyes. Some thanked God for saving their lives, giving them another chance to believe and turn to Christ. Some forgot their promises to God after a week of getting back to routine.
2. **Spiritual Awakening.** *Imagine a ship with its entire crew fast asleep*, heading for a fatal crash on the rocks of a certain island. The captain of another ship sees the approaching danger, pulls alongside, and sounds such an ear-piercing fog horn blast that the entire crew springs to its feet. Being awakened to their danger, the crew works to turn the ship around and they are saved from impending destruction. In this story, we see that the ear-piercing awakening call is like God’s heart-piercing spiritual awakening and internal call. The sailor’s springing to life and seeing their desperate condition represents regeneration. The turning of the approaching death to life represents salvation and conversion from death to life.
3. **Repentance.** *Miss Reside was the first woman missionary to the Kiowa Indians of Oklahoma.* They named her “Aim-day-co”. When some visitors asked the chief why they named Miss Reside “Aim-day-co”, he replied, “When we Kiowas see someone heading in the wrong direction, we call out ‘Aim-day-co!’ Miss Reside came to tell us ‘Aim-day-co’ that we were all heading the wrong direction; we need to turn around to come to Christ.”
4. **The Ethiopian eunuch responded to the preaching of Jesus.** **Acts 8:27-39** “27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, 28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. 32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. 34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. 36 And as they went on *their way*, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what

doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” We see the gospel preached by Philip through the reading of Isaiah’s prophecy. The gospel has reached the Ethiopian eunuch – who represents Africa – at the fringe of the known world (Acts 1:8).

5. **Knowing Christ made all the difference.** *James was converted when he was fifteen.* One day, one of his former neighbour met him. “Hi James, how are you doing?” “I’m doing very well, thank you,” he replied. “Say James, I heard that you’re really serious about church now, is that true?” James replied, “yes.” “But I remember you once told me that you disliked going to church so much, the praying, Bible reading and all that boring stuff; so what’s changed?” James replied “Yes. At that time I did not know the Saviour Jesus Christ who was spoken of in the Bible; but now, I have come to know Him and to love Him. When you come to love someone, then being with the person is not boring, but a delight and a joy. Isn’t it?”
6. **Joy of salvation.** In the third century, A.D., Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, wrote to a friend, “It is a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it, a quiet and holy people, who have learnt a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. they are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are Christians – and I am one of them.”
7. **John Bunyan struggled for a year.** The author of Pilgrim’s Progress, in his autobiography, wrote of his conversion experience of deep, despairing, convictions and temptations, before finding deliverance in Christ: “Now I thought, I am surely possessed of the devil... For ... I have heard the most blasphemous thoughts in my heart. I could not feel love or peace in my heart. I felt as though I had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit. I had often had to use my hand to shut my mouth so that I would not utter any blasphemous words. I think I felt more miserable than the condition of a dog or a toad. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa 57:20-21). And now my heart was, at times, exceeding hard; if I would have given a thousand pounds for a tear, I could not shed one; no, nor sometimes scarce desire to shed one. I was much dejected to think that this should be my lot. I saw some could mourn and lament their sin; and others again, could rejoice and bless God for Christ; and others could quietly talk of, and with gladness remember, the Word of God; while I only was in the storm or tempest. This much sunk me; I should bemoan my hard luck, but I could not get out of these things. This temptation lasted about a year, and I attended church, prayer, Bible reading with great afflictions and torment.”
8. **John Newton converted after a crisis.** A hard man who often mocked God, John Newton was considered impious even by his godless sailing mates. One night he was awakened by a violent wave crashing against the vessel. Water filled his cabin. Hurrying above, he found the timbers had been ripped away. All were in terrible danger as the ship plunged through a furious storm. Men pumped water out of the ship desperately. Clothes and bedding were stuffed into holes and boards nailed over them. John joined those who were manning the pumps. Too exhausted to pump anymore, he was lashed to the wheel to try and steer the ship. The storm raged on and on. It was bitterly cold, and the cold wind and waves lashed mercilessly on him and the men who had few clothes left. It was hopeless. John turned his eyes back over his life. Raised to the age of seven by a Christian mother, he had sought the Lord with fasts and prayers. But failing to find God, he became bitter. In his heart he believed Christianity to be true. But feeling he was the greatest of sinners, he doubted whether it was possible for him to be saved. He waited with fear to receive his doom. But soon, he received the good news that the ship was freed of water. Then he began to pray and think of Jesus who he had so often despised. He remembered Jesus died for him and those who trust in Him. He realized he needed a Saviour and snatched a free moment to read His Bible. Though the storm raged on for days, John spent moments in Scripture and prayed for guidance. Hungry, cold, exhausted, the men kept the ship afloat. Only one died of exhaustion, and finally they reached

Ireland. Newton realized the story of the prodigal son exactly mirrored his case. He never turned back from that day of salvation. “It was not until long after when I had gained some clear views of the infinite righteousness and grace of Christ Jesus my Lord, that I had a deep and strong apprehension of my state by nature and practice; and perhaps till then I could not have borne the sight. So wonderfully does the Lord proportion the discoveries of sin and grace. For He knows our frame, and that if He were to put forth the greatness of His power, a poor sinner would be instantly overwhelmed, and crushed as a moth.” After conversion, he eventually realised that slavery was a sinful trade, and became an abolitionist, a pastor and a hymnwriter: *“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, and now am found, was blind but now I see.”*

9. **Lydia (Acts 16:14-15) responded to gospel preaching.** “14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought *us*, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained *us*.” Lydia’s heart was opened to listen and receive the words of the gospel. After conversion, she loved to serve Paul, show hospitality, and perhaps gain opportunity to hear Paul continue teaching and preaching the Word.
10. **The Philippian jailor (Acts 16:26-33) converted after a crisis.** “26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. 29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.” The jailor almost committed suicide as he was desperate and terrified of losing the prisoners. But the prisoners were safe. Fearful of judgment by a Holy God, the jailor was forced by the supernatural earthquake and circumstances, realizing he must reckon with the God proclaimed by Paul and Silas. He asked, how can I be saved? It was a dramatic conversion. Although dramatic conversions may look more impressive to us outwardly, God sees and knows the heart of every person. The heart of an unregenerated civil church-attender is just as sinful and depraved as the heart of the notorious criminal. Both require the miraculous regenerating and converting power of the Holy Spirit.
11. **An older man** told his conversion story to a group: he had left home at an early age, lived in sin, became involved in crime, and ended up in prison. *“There, God found me, converted me, and I could not run away. He convicted me through His word, and I came out of prison a free person, physically and spiritually.”* A younger man responded, “God has certainly performed great wonders in your life, but He has done even greater miracles of grace in mine. My heart is just as sinful as yours, and God miraculously spared me from departing in the way of outward sin. He graciously converted me as a young boy before I got that far!”
12. **The sweetness of the Gospel. Rev Jonathan Edwards** was a very God-fearing minister whose ministry the Lord richly blessed in the spiritual revivals which took place in his congregation. In his conversion experience, we found no account of any deep and distressing convictions of sin at the beginning; although later, perhaps few men ever attained to such humbling views of the depth of the depravity of the human heart. His first views of divine things were clear and full of delight: *“I remember the sort of inward sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since.* As I read these words in 1 Timothy 1:17 ‘Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.’, there came into my soul, a sense of the glory of God, a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before. *I thought, how excellent God was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy God, and be raptured with Him in heaven forever!* From that time, I began to have a new idea about Christ, the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by Him. An inward sweet sense of these things came into my mind and my

soul was swept away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. This divine sense of inward sweetness gradually increased. My view of everything in life changed. There is now a calm, sweet cast or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God's excellency, His wisdom, His purity, and His love seemed to appear in everything."

13. **John Calvin** was immersed in Roman Catholic doctrines and tradition and rejected his cousin Olivetan's new faith. Olivetan said "There are but two religions in the world: the one class of religions are those which men have invented, in which man saves himself by ceremonies and good works; the other is that which is revealed in the Bible, which teaches man to look for salvation solely from the free grace of God." Calvin retorted "I will have none of your new doctrines. You think that I have lived in error all my days?" But Calvin was not so sure. As soon as Olivetan departed, Calvin burst into tears, fell upon his knees, and prayed to God for the doubts and anxieties that agitate him. Calvin said his conversion dated around 1532 or 1533, and was sudden, through private study, as he failed to find peace in absolutions, penances, and intercessions of the Roman Catholic Church. In his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin wrote "*By a sudden conversion, God subdued and reduced to docility my soul, which was more hardened against such things than one would expect of my youthful years... Like a flash of light, I realized in what an abyss of errors, in what chaos I was.*"

14. **Martin Luther's** recounted his conversion as around 1519, two years after posting the ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg church door: "I had already that year returned to interpret the Psalter anew. ... after I had lectured in the university on St. Paul's epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the one to the Hebrews. I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, "**In it the righteousness of God is revealed,**" that had stood in my way. **For I hated that word "righteousness of God,"** which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they call it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, **I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners,** and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, '**He who through faith is righteous shall live.**'" There I began to understand that **the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith.** And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." **Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.** There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scripture from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "righteousness of God." **Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.** Later I read Augustine's The Spirit and the Letter, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God's righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us. Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was pleasing that God's righteousness with which we are justified was taught."