



WHAT HAPPENS AT SALVATION

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INTRODUCTION

Many events take place in or for a person when that person places his or her faith in Jesus for the first time. In other words, these are the things that happen “at salvation.” However, it may be more accurate to say that all these things (and others) together make up what we call “salvation.”

Because these all happen simultaneously, we cannot really put them in “chronological” order. On the other hand, there is a “logical” order, because some events are based on others. For instance, God cannot declare a person to be righteous (justification) until he has forgiven that person’s sin (remission) and given that person all of Jesus’ righteousness (imputation). So, logically, remission and imputation are prerequisites for justification.

In this short article, we will attempt to discover the logical order of events, explain the terms, and provide Scriptural support. The purpose is to help us better understand God’s amazing salvation and show the complete impossibility that anyone could lose it.

REGENERATION

To “re-generate” has the same meaning as to be “born again.” Nothing else in salvation can happen until a person experiences the “new birth.” This takes place when the person initially places their faith in Jesus alone, what we usually call “salvation.”

*Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* John 3:3 (NASB)

*“He saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of **the new birth** and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.”* Titus 3:5

REDEMPTION

Our redemption is something that happens in several stages, both before and at the moment of salvation. Specifically, redemption has three parts to it:

Purchase: God illustrates the spiritual state of unbelievers as Satan’s slaves for sale in the open market. The price to purchase us for himself was the death of Christ.

*“For you were **bought at a price**. Therefore glorify God with your body.”*
1 Corinthians 6:20

*"But false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. These false teachers will infiltrate your midst with destructive heresies, even to the point of denying the Master **who bought them**. As a result, they will bring swift destruction on themselves."*

2 Peter 2:1

Not for resale: Sometimes owners would purchase slaves just to place them back on the market at a later time for more money. God not only purchased our lives at the cross, but he also removed us from the slave market forever.

***Christ redeemed us** from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (because it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree") in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, so that we could receive the promise of the Spirit by faith. Galatians 3:13-14*

Release: This purchase does not require us to serve God like slaves. Rather than forcing his lordship on us, God desires that we choose to submit ourselves to him as our Lord. Unlike a slave bought on the market, God has freed us to serve either him or ourselves but offers the best only to those who choose to remain faithful to him.

*"He gave himself for us **to set us free** from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good."*

Titus 2:14

REMISSION

This is the most common concept of salvation. To remit means "to forgive or pardon." It is at this point, logically – after we have believed, are born again, and redeemed – that God handles our sin.

The Bible describes us as having a "bank account" with God. Because of our sin, we are in total bankruptcy before him, a hole so deep that no number of good works could ever dig us out. At this point, our sin is completely removed from us, and God grants us a complete pardon.

*"As far as the east is from the west, so far has **He removed our transgressions from us**." Psalm 103:12 (NASB)*

*"In him we have redemption through his blood, **the forgiveness of our trespasses**, according to the riches of his grace..." Ephesians 1:7*

IMPUTATION

The Bible describes humans as completely, spiritually bankrupt before God. We are so far spiritually depraved that we cannot do enough good to even break even with God. Yet that is all forgiveness/remission does.

If the salvation “package” stopped with the forgiveness of our sin and provided nothing more, we would essentially be like Adam and Eve – just innocent, back to zero.

Imputation goes far beyond that. Imputation placed all our sin on Jesus at the cross but also placed all his righteousness on us. Essentially, at salvation, our “bank account” with God goes from infinitely negative, with no hope of paying it off, to infinitely positive, with no chance of going back into debt.

So, the righteousness we have is not our own. It is still the gift of God, who credited all of Jesus’ righteousness to our individual accounts when we believed in him.

*“God made the one who did not know sin **to be sin for us**, so that in him **we would become the righteousness of God.**” 2 Corinthians 5:21*

*“...and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because **I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness**— a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ's faithfulness.” Philippians 3:9*

JUSTIFICATION

In the same way that *remission* and *imputation* are banking terms, *justification* is a legal term that refers to the ruling God makes about a person. Before salvation every person is guilty of sin – both the general sin nature and personal sins – and the only verdict could be “Guilty!”

*“And although you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you formerly lived according to this world's present path, according to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience, among whom **all of us also formerly lived out our lives** in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath** even as the rest...” Ephesians 2:1-3*

However, once a person has had his or her bankruptcy pardoned (remission, forgiveness) and has had Jesus’ righteousness credited (imputation), the only verdict God can make without violating his own nature is “Not guilty!” God cannot look at a person with Jesus’ righteousness, determine that he is guilty, and still be a just God. To call a person guilty

and condemn him after remission and imputation are granted would make God an unjust God, and salvation would be a farce. Since his verdict comes "after" his gift, God remains just while still declaring a sinner "not guilty."

*"God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, **so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness.**" Romans 3:25-26*

*"There is therefore now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**" Romans 8:1*

RECONCILIATION

We usually define "reconcile" as "to bring into agreement or harmony." One day everything in all creation will be reconciled to God in the fact that we will all finally recognize Jesus for who he truly is (Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:19-20).

However, at salvation, believers come into a special reconciliation with God through Jesus. Once we have been legally declared righteous by God, we are no longer enemies against him but have come into a friendly relationship. This will not be the forced bowing of heads and knees before him, but rather a willful decision to recognize him as the Savior now, in this life. In fact, our message to this world is that they should come to him now, too, while they still have the choice.

*"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, since **we have been reconciled**, will we be saved by his life?" Romans 5:10*

*"And all these things are from God who **reconciled us to himself through Christ**, and who has given us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's trespasses against them, and **he has given us the message of reconciliation.**" 2 Corinthians 5:18-19*

INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT

One of the greatest gifts a Christian has is God's Holy Spirit living inside of us. When we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us spiritually and accomplishes a series of tasks, all integral to our salvation.

*"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that **God's Spirit lives in you?**" 1 Corinthians 3:16*

This truth of the indwelling Spirit is exceptionally important because a person without the Holy Spirit is not saved at all.

*"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now **if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him.**"* Romans 8:9

Sealing: One of the first actions of the Holy Spirit upon indwelling a new believer is to seal him or her. In ancient times, like today, a seal could signify several things: identification, ownership, and security. Notice that this seal is in place until "the day of redemption." Salvation cannot be lost or given up because God promised that his seal would remain intact.

*"And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)– **when you believed in Christ– you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory.**"*
Ephesians 1:13-14

*"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, **by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**"* Ephesians 4:30

*"But it is God who establishes us together with you in Christ and who anointed us, who also **sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a down payment.**"* 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

Spirit baptism: An oft-misunderstood gift of God is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for baptism means "to immerse." In water baptism, a person is to be fully immersed into water. In Spirit baptism, the Holy Spirit immerses the new believer into something else – the Body of Christ or the Church. This creates an unbreakable union between the new believer and Jesus himself.

Long before a Christian becomes a member of a local congregation, he or she has already become a member of the "universal Church," the body of Christians that includes all believers from the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 until Jesus returns for his Church at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Although there were certainly godly believers in the Old Testament and there will be in the future Tribulation and Kingdom, the Church is made up only of those who have believed in Christ during this period.

Contrary to the beliefs of some denominations, Spirit baptism happens immediately at salvation. It is not something we must pray or ask for, and it is not something that only some Christians receive. (Nearly every reference to baptism in the Christian epistles (Romans through Jude) refers to Spirit baptism instead of water baptism.)

*"For in one Spirit **we were all baptized into one body**. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit."*

1 Corinthians 12:13

*"Or do you not know that as many as were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life. For if **we have become united with him** in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of his resurrection." Romans 6:3-5*

Spiritual gifts: Once we have been united with Jesus and his Church by Spirit baptism, the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to empower us to fulfill Jesus' command to love one another. A spiritual gift is the outworking of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life in a special way to build up a fellow Christian. Every Christian is empowered in at least one way and is responsible for submitting to the Holy Spirit to help other believers grow.

*"Now **there are different gifts**, but the same Spirit. And there are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all. ... **It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things.**" 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11*

Illumination: The Scriptures declare that an unsaved person cannot understand spiritual truths. (This is why it is futile to try to reason with an unbeliever or answer all of their questions before they will believe in Jesus. They simply cannot understand.) However, at salvation, when the Holy Spirit indwells a new believer, he or she is given a great new ability to understand spiritual truth. Another word for *illumination* is *enlightenment*.

Of course, the ability to understand does not mean that we will understand it automatically. It takes a great deal of time and effort to come to know the Scriptures and know God, but the Holy Spirit makes this possible. No Christian has an excuse for not understanding God's Word.

*"But just as it is written, 'Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love him.' **God has revealed these to us by the Spirit.** For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ... Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **so that we may know the things that are freely given to us by God.**" 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, 12*

ADOPTION

In human families, adoption is the process by which a person, usually a child, is moved from one family into another by a legal action. Once the adoption is completed the child has new parents and (typically) a new name. This is one aspect of adoption in salvation as well, whereby God makes believers his children through their faith in Jesus. It is "familial adoption."

*"But to all who have received him— those who believe in his name— **he has given the right to become God's children.**" John 1:12*

*"For in Christ Jesus **you are all sons of God through faith.**" Galatians 3:26*

However, in the New Testament, there is a second meaning to adoption. Not only is a newborn baby brought into God's family, but he or she is also given the full rights as an adult. This is "positional adoption."

In the Greco-Roman world, a natural-born son would have to be "adopted" by his father to receive the full privileges and rights as a "son." This usually happened at a special ceremony around the age of 13. Until that point, even sons had only the rights of slaves or servants. However, when a person is born again (regeneration), he or she is not only adopted into God's family, he or she is also immediately given the full rights as a son. (Ancient daughters never received those rights, so the New Testament always calls us "sons," regardless of our gender, to show that both male and female believers receive these rights.)

*"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but **you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, 'Abba, Father.'** The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God's children. **And if children, then heirs** (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ)— if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him." Romans 8:14-17*

Citizenship: Another aspect of adoption is that we have a new citizenship as well. By adopting us into his family and giving us the full rights, privileges, and responsibilities as adult sons, God also gave us full citizenship into the Church and, eventually, into Jesus' kingdom when he comes to reign. This heavenly citizenship is more important than any citizenship or allegiance we have on Earth.

*"So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but **you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household**, because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone." Ephesians 2:19-20*

*"But **our citizenship is in heaven**— and we also await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." Philippians 3:20*

*"He delivered us from the power of darkness and **transferred us to the kingdom of the Son** he loves." Colossians 1:13*

SANCTIFICATION

The word "sanctify" means "to set apart, to make holy." It is the fulfillment of justification when God declared us completely righteous. In a sense, sanctification is the process by which we *become* what God has already declared us to *be*.

Sanctification has three phases – past, present, and future – each one having to do with how we relate to sin.

Past: Past sanctification is justification. It is that point when God declared us "not guilty" and removed the *penalty of sin*. (See "Justification" on page five.)

Present: Present sanctification is sometimes called *progressive* sanctification. It is the daily process by which we become a little more like Jesus every day as we study the Bible, pray, obey God, confess our sins, and serve others – as we walk the Path. This is the purpose of all of the commands in the New Testament for Christians. It is through this process that the *power of sin* is removed. Because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, no Christian has to sin, if we would constantly submit ourselves to the Spirit. This power is available to us at all times and is based solely on our willingness to let the Holy Spirit lead us and our obedience to him.

*"But I say, **live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.** For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want. ... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **If we live by the Spirit, let us also behave in accordance with the Spirit.**" Galatians 5:16-17, 22-25*

*"Therefore **do not let sin reign in your mortal body** so that you obey its desires, and do not present your members to sin as instruments to be used for unrighteousness, but **present yourselves to God** as those who are alive from the dead **and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness.**" Romans 6:12-13*

Future: One of the great hopes for a believer is the anticipation of the day that we will finally be with Jesus, and the *presence of sin* will finally be gone. This future and final aspect of sanctification is sometimes called "glorification," because it will take place when we receive our glorified bodies in the resurrection, and we will no longer have our sinful nature.

Even though glorification does not happen immediately when we believe, it is part of the full sanctification process that begins then, and we are guaranteed that it will most certainly take place.

*"For this is the will of my Father— for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and **I will raise him up at the last day.**" John 6:40*

*"Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that **whenever it is revealed we will be like him,** because we will see him just as he is." 1 John 3:2*

*"Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and **we will be changed.** For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality." 1 Corinthians 15:51-53*

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THANK YOU

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