

Too Sinful to be Saved?

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Is salvation (which includes forgiveness, a relationship with Christ, and heaven) just for *good* people?

The apostle Paul didn't think so.

For Paul, earning salvation on the basis of good behavior is as impossible as driving a car from California to Hawaii. You may start with break-neck acceleration, but you will end up on the ocean floor, hopelessly short of the goal.



All of us have sinned so grievously and so often that the merit system for salvation doesn't make sense.

How can we possibly recover from all the years of disobedience—thousands of actual sins against God? And how can we totally stop sinning in the future?

No, salvation is actually for *sinners*. I know that we don't like this word, but it is a biblical one—and it tells the truth about us. But there is hope. Consider this arresting proposition from the pen of the apostle Paul himself:

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

In this single, uncomplicated sentence, Paul placards the one saving message of the entire Bible, and draws together all of redemptive history. It is one of the most hopeful and life-giving statements ever recorded. And it includes people just like you and me.

But Paul says even more: ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—among whom I am foremost of all.”***

Christ Jesus can save the worst of sinners!

The faithful apostle explains his previous condition like this: ***“even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor . . . I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life”*** (v. 13).

Paul is saying that true mercy was required because only mercy would work. Mercy is God's kindness though we are totally undeserving sinners—even if we are among the worst of such sinners.

Paul, who originally went by the name “Saul,” had persecuted the church thinking he was doing God a favor. But God met up with him on the road to Damascus, forever changing him into a follower of Christ. He encountered the very One whose adherents he was persecuting. Paul could never erase the revolting fact that he was an extremely pernicious sinner before he met Christ. But, God saves even the worst of them, as he happily discovered.

What's the point? It is this: If God's eternal purpose is to save sinners and He is able to save even the worst of them, then He can save *you!*

In fact, the knowledge of your sinfulness is the ticket you need to come to Christ for salvation. He has never saved anyone but sinners—not one time! You qualify for mercy, because what you need is what you could not possibly deserve. Even faith or belief in Christ is a gift of God's mercy to you, by which you may come to Him for life.

Here is some practical help for all who must have God's mercy.

First, admit to God that you cannot save yourself. You are helplessly bound in your sin and have no hope in yourself to remove your sin or to deserve forgiveness and heaven.

Second, read the Bible desperately. Like a deer panting for water, seek to lap it up in gulps as if your life depended on it. The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John could be read over and over. Pray that God will open your eyes to see the beauty and work of Christ on your behalf.

Third, express to God that you are willing to come to Him on His gracious terms if only He will guide you.

Finally, be willing to talk things out with an informed friend, pastor, or mentor. But be sure you talk to someone who really understands that salvation is a gift of God received by faith, and not a reward for good behavior.

Like a light left burning in a dark room, keep this truth alive in your heart: “If God can save the worst of sinners, he can surely save *me.*”

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For a straightforward explanation about salvation, read *Pursuing God—A Seeker's Guide* by the author.