

## CAN WE SAVE OURSELVES?

Who is responsible for my sins? Of course, you will say, “You, you are responsible for your own sins.” Who then is responsible for my salvation? I am responsible for my salvation! But You object! “No one can save himself!”, you reply. Jesus’ apostle Peter thought otherwise.

In the first “gospel sermon” that Peter ever preached under the power of the Holy Spirit, he said, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!” (Acts 2:39 ESV) What does the Holy Spirit mean by that statement?

Hello, I am Larry Murdock.

Some people say that humans are born with sin. They read the poetic statement of Psalms 58:3, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.” Or, they read David’s cry in Psalms 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” These interpreters also add Jesus’ apostle Paul’s statement to their argument, where he wrote, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Ephesians 2:1-3, ESV).

A more vivid description of sin could not be written! But notice the words carefully. “You once walked, following...following...carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.” You see, this is my human activity. It was the desires of my body and my mind that I was carrying out; those desires were stimulated by where I was headed. I was “following the course of this world.” I was “following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” I was traveling in the wrong direction, “walking”, “following” a spirit of disobedience taught by the prince of this world. Three times Jesus identified Satan as the “prince of this world.” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 KJV).

No doubt, at the earliest of age I was being led by the “course of this world.” My parents had followed this course until they chose to go another road, the road that Jesus described as having a “narrow gate and a hard road.” (Matthew 7:13, 14). That is when another route was demonstrated before my young eyes.

No, I was not born with sin, but I was born into a world of sin.

Ezekiel put the blame for unrighteous behavior squarely on the shoulders of the sinner when he wrote, “The soul who sins shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:4, 20 ESV) Yes indeed, I am responsible for my sins. Am I responsible for my salvation?

Is Peter correct? Could those people who first heard the good news **save themselves** from that crooked generation? Peter gave those ancient hearers an option. Remain as you are with a pricked, guilty conscience or save yourselves. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38 ESV). And then Peter explained further, “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” The “promise” is the promise of forgiveness and the Spirit in our lives. “And with many other words [*Peter*] bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” (Acts 2:39-40 ESV) And then we read the rest of the story. “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41 ESV)

What about this modern generation? Is it sinful; is it crooked? Can I save myself from this crooked generation? That ancient option is also an option for me! That’s right! I can choose to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This action will result in the “forgiveness of sins” and me receiving the “gift of the Holy Spirit.” For the same promise made that the ancients is even made to me where I am among the “far off”. This Gentile has heard Peter’s words. My heart was pricked with the news of a Savior. I chose salvation. I entered the narrow gate. I am choosing to walk in this “hard” road of salvation in the midst of a sinful, misguided, yea crooked, generation.

God has indeed given you and me an option.

Option 1: We can continue to go forward living in sin, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, listening to the spirit who is at work in all the sons of disobedience. In that case, on the day of accountability, I will be found dead in my own trespasses and sin.

Or we can choose to take our heavenly Father's other option. Yes, God has provided a second option. Forgiveness.

But wait! A Judge cannot offer forgiveness. A Judge must follow the law and the penalty that the law commands. In the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2) there can be no forgiveness. The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) According to the law there is no option of forgiveness; there is no way in the law that the guilty can be acquitted, justified. Sinners are guilty!

But our heavenly Father has devised a way that He Himself, the great Judge of all the earth, has obtained the option of forgiveness. You see, because of the law of sin and death the salvation of humans is only possible by mercy and forgiveness. But how can the all-merciful judge of the earth overlook anyone's sin in the world? The judge does NOT overlook it.

However, the Judge sees that it is a matter of record that the penalty has been paid. The only begotten son of the Judge has paid the penalty for everyone's sin. The Son of God has given the Judge the option of forgiveness. But on what will the Judge render His decision? Romans 2:6 comes to mind: "He will render to each one according to his works" (Romans 2:6 ESV). Will a person save himself/herself from this crooked generation?

The Judge will review the heart and the life of each individual. The Judge has decided that since in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22). if by the sin of one man the whole world could become sinners, then by the righteousness of one man sin can be forgiven.

And so, by examining the heart and repentance and obedience of each person the Judge of all the earth can overlook the sins and grant forgiveness, based on their works. God "Will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality." (Romans 2:6-11 ESV)

Yes friends, Jesus gave His heavenly Father the option of salvation. Jesus' apostle Paul put it this way: "I am not ashamed of the gospel...." Why might Paul be ashamed of the gospel? Because the "gospel" is the story of a capital punishment crucifixion reserved for shameful criminals. But it doesn't end there. The One who died also arose from the tomb. There is the resurrection in this story! And so, Paul is not ashamed! And that crucifixion-and-resurrection **is** good news! Paul continued, it is good news "for [*that news*] is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Friends, the greatest "power" in the universe needed power to save! That's right! God Almighty needed power to exercise His great mercy! His only begotten, Jesus, the One God anointed as "Christ", by His death for sin, gave His heavenly Father the option to forgive, and gave you the option to receive it! The Judge of all the earth needed to show that He is "righteous" if He chooses to forgive. And so, "in [***the gospel***] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith (***the faith of Christ in going to the cross***) for faith (***for your belief***), as it is written, "The righteous (***the justified, the acquitted***) shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17 ESV)

And so, humans can save themselves in this generation by their faith, that is, their repentance and immersion into the name of Jesus Christ in order to receive this great forgiveness purchased by the blood of Christ on the cross. And so, it is said by Jesus' apostle John, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments." (1 John 2:2-3 ESV)

Yes friend, you can save yourself from this crooked generation. You can obey the gospel and be assured of the forgiveness of your sins! How can this be true? because Jesus Christ suffered the penalty for your sins. But this sacrifice was not only for you, but for all them afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. God calls by the gospel. Jesus' apostle Paul said the Thessalonians were "called...through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:14 ESV). The result of answering the gospel call is the possibility of obtaining "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is no wonder then that Jesus predicted, that "This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14 ESV). Friends, you have heard the gospel; will you believe and obey it by your repentance, immersion, and living for Christ?