

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 13

The Legal Model vs the Healing Model

What does a person have to do to ensure that they will have eternal life? The answer varies depending upon who you ask. Most people today understand the plan of salvation, or the way a person is saved, in the setting of a judicial, legal model. There are a number of reasons for this, but a man who may have had the most influence on this view was John Calvin. John Calvin was considered a leader among the great reformers of the Protestant Reformation. Calvin was originally educated as a lawyer, but later became a priest in the Roman Catholic Church with his legal training naturally influencing his views and ideas.

Many major doctrines held in mainline churches today can be attributed to a large four-volume work completed in the sixteenth century by Calvin entitled "*The Institutes of the Christian Religion.*"

These include doctrines such as pre-destination - the immortality of the soul - the eternal punishment in the fires of hell, and the topic we will study in this lesson, the legal view of the plan of salvation to name a few.

The word "legal" in this context means a system with laws which carry prescribed punishment for their violation. In order to avoid the penalty the violator must receive pardon.

Though there are variations, the following is a list of the basic points of the legal model.

1. God is the Almighty Sovereign Creator of the universe and as such has the authority proclaim a law or code of conduct to be obeyed by all His creatures.

2. Violators of God's law must be punished.
3. The punishment for violation (sin) is suffering and death.
4. God is the Judge and Executioner of the penalty against sin.
5. To avoid punishment, the guilty party must be pardoned.
6. All humans are violators of God's law – all are guilty and condemned to suffering and death.
7. The innocent son of God came and paid the penalty on behalf of the guilty.
8. If a person accepts Christ death on his behalf he is pardoned and will not be punished but granted eternal life.

The popular King James Bible, because it was translated at a time when the reformers such as Calvin were having such a great influence on the church, reflects this “legal model.” Because of this most people are taught that God as an awesome deity watching over the universe, a loving God, but yet a just God, one who will punish you if you break His law because justice requires it. That's the way the legal system works. With all mankind guilty before God then it stands to reason that the major focus in the legal model of salvation is forgiveness, or to use the legal term, pardon.

If a person is at the place in their understanding that they see God in this way, they need to know God will pardon them for breaking His law. So the Bible says – *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins”* (I John 1:9).

However, there are a number of problems with this legal model of salvation. The major problem is that with the legal model there is little or no focus on character change because it is preoccupied with forgiveness seeing that as all that is needed to avoid the penalty.

It also questions God's willingness to forgive, thus distorting the truth about His character. When asked why Jesus had to die, most will answer, Jesus had to die so God would forgive our sin. That only by the sacrificial death of His own Son could we be forgiven!

In saying that, they are saying that God requires the blood of His own Son before He will forgive us! This is preached from the pulpit, taught in Bible classes and written in the words of church hymns. The following quotes taken from a set of widely circulated Bible study guides demonstrate this view.

“Jesus had to die so God could forgive us of our sin.”

“Sin can be forgiven only by death.”

“When Jesus died, all our sins were forgiven.”

The problem is, this is **not** what the Bible teaches! For example; note the following text:

Psalm 40:6 *"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require."*

God does not require that the sinner appease Him in some way before He will forgive. That was not the purpose for the sacrifices in the Old Testament system. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, what did He cry out? *"Father forgive them...."* and no one had repented, confessed or asked to be forgiven!

If God required the death of Jesus as payment before He could forgive our sin that means God is not forgiving. For example, if you owed someone a million dollars and was unable to repay the debt and a friend, seeing your dilemma came to you and said "forgive my friend the debt, I will pay you the million dollars." So your creditor accepts the money from your friend and says to you "your debt is forgiven." But the fact is your creditor did not forgive your debt, he just accepted payment from someone else!

If God would only forgive us if Jesus paid our debt, then God has not forgiven us, He has only accepted payment from Jesus. If a person carefully thinks this through, it can readily be seen that Satan has artfully crafted a theory of salvation that makes God

look no better than the pagan gods of old who required a blood sacrifice before they would forgive and bless!

Therefore an important message from the cross is that God has forgiven us even before we ask as we learned in a previous lesson, but of course we don't realize that until we go to the Cross!

The expression, "*Jesus died to pay for our sins,*" which, by the way, is not in the Bible, is not a well thought out statement. If that statement is true, then all people will be saved whether they accept Christ's death or not. If He paid for all my sins, they are paid for whether I accept it or not. If the bill is paid, it is paid, and no longer owed whether I acknowledge it or not! Again, if these things are carefully thought through they do not make good sense! Another problem with the legal model is that it leads to presumption because it leads many to feel forgiveness is all they need to be saved. Since Jesus has secured that for them, that's all that matters. Thus they have no lasting motivation to change or to live a righteous life. This is the foundation of the "once saved always saved" doctrine.

Thought question: Will simply being forgiven save us? Will forgiveness change our nature? Will being forgiven make a violent person safe to live with?

The obvious answer to each of these questions is "No." Only a new heart and right spirit will make us safe to live with, now, or in the hereafter. When Nicodemus came to Jesus that night asking Him about salvation – did Jesus say to have eternal life "*You must be forgiven?*" or "*You must be born again?*" Jesus said we must be born again! (John 3:1-3) Jesus was saying that God's grace changes a person so drastically that it is like being born all over again. One becomes "*a new creature in Christ.*" (II Corinthians 5:17)

We need to re-examine the age-old question, "*What must I do to be saved?*" putting aside the old "*legal model*" and begin looking at salvation in a new way, within the setting of a "*healing model.*"

In the "healing model" model, instead of seeing all human beings as being born as guilty criminals under the sentence of death, all human beings are born with a terminal illness that will destroy them if they are not healed. This is a spiritual infection, they are "sin-sick." The major focus in this model is not forgiveness, but finding the remedy whereby one may be cured so that they will not die.

This model, as with any other teaching, must be found true to the scriptures to be accepted. The following verses are just a few that clearly demonstrate this model is biblical.

Isaiah 1:5,6 *"Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. **The whole head is sick**, And the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it, But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment."*

Isaiah 53:5 *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes **we are healed**."*

Jeremiah 17:14 *"Heal me, O LORD, and **I shall be healed**; save me, and I shall be saved: for you are my praise."*

Mark 2:17 *"When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

Matthew 13:15 *"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that **I should heal them**."*

It is clear that these texts are not referring to the healing of diseases of the body, but rather spiritual healing of the heart and

mind. We are all familiar with the New Testament term used for salvation, the word “*saved*.” The Greek word is “*sozo*” - and it means, “*to be whole*” “*to be well*” or “*to be safe*.” This word can be understood as “being healed,” as well as “being saved.” It is translated both ways:

Mark 5:22,23 *"And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that **she may be healed**, and she will live."*

In this verse the word “healed” is the Greek word “sozo.”

Mark 10:25 - 26 *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "**Who then can be saved?**"*

In this verse the Greek word “sozo” is translated “saved.”

In all these passages we can clearly see the Bible supports the “*healing model*.” By looking at salvation in the setting of this model we will begin to find answers to our questions that make sense. Questions like, how did we get in this sinful condition in the first place? As we learned previously, the sin problem began in the mind of Lucifer and then later spread to this earth.

Isaiah 14:12 *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! 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;"*

“*You have said in your heart...*” A person’s thinking is not done in the organ called the heart, but in the mind. When Adam and Eve made the decision to follow the suggestion of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, their brains were changed, literally. This “brain damage” was passed on to their children.

Note the following statement from the book, **The New Brain – How the Modern Age is Rewiring Your Mind** by Richard Resak, M.D. Published by Rodale 2003

“We now recognize that our brain isn’t limited by considerations that are applicable to machines. Thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than mechanical laws, determine the health of our brain. Furthermore, we now know that the brain never loses the power to transform itself on the basis of experience, and this transformation can occur over very short intervals.”

The brain can transform itself, and that change can occur over very short intervals. When God created Adam and Eve they were created with their minds “wired” for righteousness. But when the serpent introduced the new thought to their minds that God could not be trusted, and they made the decision that Satan was right and ate of the tree which God said not to eat of, their brains were changed. Their brains were actually rewired and they began to think differently. As result, they had alienated themselves from God. If God had not intervened on their behalf, they would not survive the damage they had done to themselves.

Researchers have discovered that certain behavior affects the genes and can be passed on to the offspring - a proven example is alcoholism. In the same way the psychological damage incurred by Adam and Eve has passed through the genes and D.N.A. of every generation since that fateful day in the garden. As we read previously -

Romans 5:12 *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned"*

One Bible commentator described the problem in a book entitled God’s Amazing Grace, page 313:

“Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-

balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil. He was made captive by Satan, and would have remained so forever had not God specially interposed.”

“Selfishness took the place of love” and where did that happen? In the mind! This becomes clear as we realize every child is born with an inherited trait of selfishness. Things like greed, hatred, jealousy, lying, stealing, adultery, violence, murder - are only *symptoms* of the greater psychological disorder of self-centeredness.

Every sin can be traced back to self – its all about me – my needs - my wants – my rights! If not checked, this psychological disorder, like cancer or leprosy spreads and grows until it consumes its victim and in the end destroys him!

Most of us have seen enough in life to know this, so why do we cling to it - why do we justify it? Have we convinced ourselves we are fine just as we are – that we need no change? Thinking we can go on through life doing the same selfish, sinful things and yet somehow it will come out different for us? That is insane! It is insanity! In fact, that’s what sin is – it’s insanity!

This situation in the setting of the healing model can be likened to a father who has a child who is mentally ill and sometimes behaves badly. The child’s father hates what his child does, but he loves his child. He pities the child and he realizes the child doesn’t know what he’s doing. Therefore the father doesn’t punish the child, but does everything he can to help. This helps us to understand what Jesus had in mind when He said - *“Father forgive them – they know not what they do.”*

Understanding this helps us to understand how God loves the sinner while hating the sin. More than that, it helps us see better how we should relate to others whom we see as sinners. We should love them and pity them – the worse they are behaving, the more they need our sympathy and our help! We are all sin-sick, some more than others.

So in this healing model the question changes from “What must we do to be forgiven” - to - “What must we do to be to be healed – made well?”

What is the healing process? What must one do to be saved or to be healed?

I John 1:9 says *“If we **confess** our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

First Step - We must "confess," that is admit that we have a problem. Like an alcoholic in denial, some people insist that they do not have problem. So the first step, just as with an alcoholic, the sinner must “confess” they have a problem – they are sick!

Even then, if they try to correct their behavior by sheer will power they will fail, time after time. However, once a person is willing to admit they are sick (a sinner) and realize that they can’t heal themselves then they are ready for the next step. Remember Jesus said - *“They that are whole do not need a physician, but those who are sick”*

Second Step - Next we need to find a physician. This needs to be done with great care. We don’t want to go to a quack, or a doctor who has not proven to be reliable. We want to find one whom we can trust with our eternal life! The Bible says – *“Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”* (sozo - healed)

As the Lawgiver, Jesus forgives us. Then as the Creator, only He can *“Create in us a clean heart and a right spirit”* - only He can

re-wire our damaged brains. He is the Great Physician - the only One who can heal us.

Third Step - We must *go* to our physician. Jesus said, “*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*” – but He will not force us to be well. If we won’t come to Him – he can’t help us.

Fourth Step - We must faithfully keep our appointments. This includes - daily devotions - Bible study - prayer - witness - keeping the Sabbath. If we are too busy, if other things (even good things) take up our time and there is no time left for treatment, our recovery will be greatly hindered!

Fifth Step - We must do what our physician prescribes. Everyone wants to be well – to be saved, but some don’t want to do what the doctor says. The doctor may say they need a little surgery, or they may need to get some exercise or take some medicine. This is an important step. In order for us to get well, we must co-operate with our physician. If we refuse to do what the doctor prescribes can we expect to get well?

Doctors cannot save their patients who do not trust them, or have enough faith in them, to keep their appointments and do the things they prescribe. Doctors may love their sick patients; they may forgive them for not taking their medicine – but the patient will not get well, because love and forgiveness will not heal the damage.

The Bible says God has “*Loved you with an everlasting love*” and that “*His mercy endureth forever,*” but if we harden our heart and will not listen, if we will not follow God’s instructions, He will still forgive us and love us – but He can’t heal us – He can’t save us!

That means, if we don’t go to church – don’t study the Bible – don’t pray – if we don’t do the things the Bible says we should do, God will forgive us, but the changes in our brain that we need will

not take place. Our characters will not be changed and thus we will not be safe to enter the kingdom.

Ultimately, we are either in the recovery process and our sinful condition is in remission, **or**, we are getting sicker and closer not only to physical, but to spiritual death as well.

But again, we must trust and co-operate with the Great Physician, or healing will not take place and eventually we will be so hardened in sin that we will be incurable! Jesus says the same thing in a different way in the following passage.

Luke 6:47- 48 *"Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.*

Note the steps –

- 1) Come – Come to Jesus.
- 2) Hear – Carefully listen to what He says we should do.
- 3) Do – Co-operate, do the best you can to do those things He says to do, and you shall be saved. This is the simple formula Jesus gives us for salvation.

The following chart will help to compare the two models

The Legal Model	The Healing Model
God as the Sovereign Creator of the universe has arbitrarily proclaimed His law by which the universe is to be governed.	God as the Sovereign Creator of the universe has established the law of love by which the universe is to be governed.

Violators of God's law must be punished.	Violators of God's laws will suffer the natural consequence of violating those laws.
The ultimate punishment for violation (sin) is death (hell).	Sin punishes sin. The ultimate consequence of violation is death by sin, not at God's hand.
God is the judge and the executioner.	God is the Great Physician and only source of life. He alone can heal the sin sick and restore life to the dying.
To avoid punishment, we must be pardoned / forgiven.	To avoid suffering and death one must be healed; forgiveness only being a part of that process.
Since all humans are violators of the law – all are guilty and condemned to death.	All human beings have been infected with sin - sickness, thus subject to death.
The innocent Son of God came and paid the penalty for the guilty so God could pardon us.	God sent His Son that by His life and death we may be won back to trust God and thereby healed of our deadly infection.
If a person accepts Christ as savior he is pardoned and will not be punished but granted eternal life.	If a person will come to God (the Great Physician) and follow His divine instructions (prescriptions) he will be healed and will never die.

In the healing model, God does not stand as the executioner of the sentence against the wicked just as medical doctors do not kill their diseased and dying patients. They do everything possible to heal and save them! In the same way, God, the Great Physician

does not kill His sick and dying children either! Remember the following text from the lesson on the final death of the wicked.

James 1:14,15 *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

Sin is the ultimate source of death – just as a deadly disease like cancer. God is the ultimate source of life, and rather than condemning us, God is trying desperately to save us – not so He won't have to punish us – but so that sin will not destroy us! Sin kills! God heals! God gives life! Sin takes it!

We must realize who our enemy is so that we are not fighting the wrong battle. We blame sin and evil on Satan and rightly so, but if the devil died today it wouldn't change much – the seeds of evil he planted in the minds of Adam and Eve took root and have been passed down from generation to generation to everyone of us. Our worst enemy is within us! Our worst enemy is our selfish, sinful nature and it will destroy us if we don't have help!

Today, if you realize you are sin-sick – if you are not doing well, may I recommend Jesus? He accepts walk-ins - you need no appointment – and He still makes house calls. He can heal any illness – no matter how hopeless it may seem to you, but you have got to call on Him. You have got to trust Him - *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."*

Response Questions:

1. It is clear to me that I need more than God's forgiveness to be saved.

Yes ___ No ___

2. It is clear to me that sin is like a deadly disease.

Yes ___ No ___

