

Salvation: Our Work, God's Work, or Both?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | February 20, 2009



I've been in discussions with someone who believes that when a person has surrendered their life to Jesus and is maintaining a consistent walk with Him, but is severely challenged by life's unfairness...

that Jesus lives out His righteousness in us for us, (Gal 2:20; 4:19; 2 Cor 13:5; and Col 1:27). This is how the Father lived out His life in Jesus for Jesus. (John 14:10) It is Jesus who reproduces His character in us for us because we're like the Ethiopian who can't change the color of his skin and we're accustomed to doing evil. It is solely by faith alone in the righteousness of Jesus....there are no works of any kind involved. This person believes this is the 3rd Angel's Message of Rev 14, which is righteousness by faith alone in Jesus.

Does God do this supernaturally; for instance nudging the thought going down the wrong neuro pathway over into the healthier path or altering the law that governs the running of our brain. It is their belief God does this especially for people so sin damaged and broken, with problems in their life so complicated, that they are so majorly challenged at their present that they can't deal with the thought there would be works involved. Because they have worked and worked and failed so many times they are either ready to give up or "go looney" or live a life of misery. They are too damaged. They have given their life to Jesus and they are waiting on God, like scripture

tells them to do many times in the book of Psalms.....for God to supernaturally intercede in their brain circuits, otherwise if they didn't have this hope, they are doomed to live a life of misery.

I've appear to have discouraged them when referring them to p 33 of your book, Could It Be This Simple, where you say "divine power enables (in this case it was a smoker) us to tolerate the agony of withdrawal and to experience eventual freedom from their cravings". I've thought God wants to restore our self control (one of the fruit of the Spirit). Does He do this by supernaturally altering our brain circuitry, which is what it would seem to me if He nudged a thought out of the wrong path into the healthy path.

This person has such a strong desire to know truth, whereby they may be set free. Can you help in this? Thank you very much.

A.M.

Great question and one of vital importance for Christians to experience genuine victorious living. First it is important to recognize the problem and then the solution and then we can understand our role in the solution.

The problem is, because of Adam and Eve, we are born infected with a terminal condition. Some call it sin or sinfulness or iniquity. Others call it fear and selfishness and some call it the survival-of-the-fittest instinct. Regardless of what we call it, we are "born in sin conceived in iniquity" Psalms 51:5. This is a terminal condition, but it is not our individual fault. Imagine two HIV infected people get together and have a baby who is born infected with the HIV virus. What did the baby do wrong? Nothing! Yet it still has a terminal condition that if not remedied will kill it. That is our condition since Adam and Eve sinned. We are born with a condition that needs curing.

Without going into the details of how Christ achieved our remedy to sin lets just agree that whatever was needed for the salvation (healing and saving) of mankind, Christ fully accomplished it at the cross. Consider you have HIV because both your parents were infected when they had you. If someone comes along with a cure, a medicine that will remedy your condition, do you have to know how the remedy was produced or do you have to know how the medicine works inside of you in order to benefit from taking it? When taken doesn't the medicine do something inside of you you cannot do for yourself?

Now even though you don't have to know how the medicine was procured or works, you have to trust the doctor enough to take it, right? When the patient follows the prescription and takes the medicine can the person say, "I have cured myself. I have worked hard and gotten myself well?" No, they are not saved by works but by the work of the doctors who developed and produced the medicine. Likewise, Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for salvation, but He does not force anyone to accept it. It is freely offered. And for those who are won back to trust by the truth Jesus revealed about God, the Holy Spirit is poured out and takes what Christ has achieved and reproduces it in us. We get new desires, motives, and attitudes, but we never lose control of our free will. The Holy Spirit will cleanse, renew, ennoble, enlighten, lead, and convict, but God nor the Holy Spirit will never actually choose the right for anyone. Each person must exercise their own will and choose yes to God, and then choose yes to His prescription.

If God's prescription for a person's life is that they cease using harmful substances, the Holy Spirit will

enlighten, convict, and strengthen, but the Holy Spirit will not control the choice. The angels will not rip cigarettes out of someone's mouth. We must choose for our lives what God has shown us and the Holy Spirit strengthens to follow through with the task.

When mankind fell into sin our situation was terminal. We could not save or cure ourselves nor remedy our situation. No amount of work by any human being could reverse the damage. Therefore, Jesus came and became human. He partook of our nature and our terminal condition. Our iniquity was laid upon Him (Isaiah 53) and He overcame. He cured the condition! In His own personhood, He eradicated the infection from the species known as homo sapiens, that is, this single cured human being, Jesus, now becomes the source of salvation, the healing medicine, for all who obey him (Hebrews 5:8).

We never become puppets or robots controlled by God, because to do so would destroy our capacity for love. Love can only be freely given. Thus, in order to restore our ability to love, God has to restore our ability to be self-controlled, which is the last fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5, not God-controlled.

So the balance is as follows.

- The Remedy to sin was fully achieved by Christ and no one else.
- We can do nothing to add to what Christ has done to save mankind, but, each person now must choose to open their heart in trust to receive from the Holy Spirit the benefit of Christ's victory in their life.
- When we do this a supernatural transformation of character, desire, motive, and attitude takes place.
- In this process there is a daily, ongoing, and constant cooperative work of the individual with the Divine in which the person chooses to continue to follow the direction of the Heavenly Physician until they are one day fully healed and set free to be self-controlled beings operating on the law of love, which has been fully restored into the heart. (Heb 8:10).