

JESUS THOU SON OF DAVID

HAVE MERCY UPON ME

by

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2007-09-08

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| Introduction | 3 |
| Different Approaches | 5 |
| Born With a Disordered Humanity | 5 |
| You Became a Sinner By Choice | 7 |
| Jesus, Our Example, Our Substitute | 8 |
| Faith Moment by Moment | 10 |
| One Last Problem | 14 |
| Conclusion | 15 |

Introduction

Your Christian neighbor wants to know whether you are “saved.” He has been taught that what is needful for salvation can be addressed in a simple list of acknowledgments:

1. You are a sinner.
2. As a sinner, you are condemned to death and eternity in hell.
3. Because of the Father’s love for you, He sent Jesus to bear your sin and die in your place.
4. You must repent, which means agreeing that you are a sinner and agreeing that Jesus addressed all this by dying on the cross.
5. You must believe in Jesus—accept these facts—and may then consider yourself “saved.”

That’s it. (Being nice, obeying most of God’s rules, being baptized are also preferred but not required.) (The above outline follows the presentation here:

<http://www.godssimpleplan.org/gsp-english.html>). If you review what they have said, hell as a place of eternal torture comes in for mention twice. They also want you to make an instant decision: “If His plan is not perfectly clear, read this tract over and over, without laying it down, until you understand it... Please! Let God save you this very moment.”

We do not doubt the sincerity of those who thus believe. They certainly have some truth. And yet, such presentations distort the facts. The plan of salvation is equally simple, but significantly different. Try this instead:

1. You, through no decision of your own, are a being born with a disordered human organism.
2. Before you were equipped to make informed, intentional choices, you chose to act in harmony with the clamors of your disordered humanity. This is how you came to nurture attitudes of self-indulgence. Eventually you matured to a situation of moral accountability. But you trained yourself to be the consummate rebel; you chose to disobey. This is the situation of every human attaining to moral accountability—except Jesus—who has ever lived. Unless you act to break solidarity with these chosen inclinations, you will not be equipped to function in heaven and the new earth when the creation is restored to its intended order. Rather, you will be justly punished, your existence ended.
3. Because of God's love for us, a divine plan to restore the human race was put into operation. Jesus came in a humanity like your own so that He could present before fallen man an Example to pattern after, and die as a Substitute for you thus receiving the penalty that in justice would otherwise forever end your existence.
4. You must repent, meaning to choose to make a complete and persistent change of direction. You acknowledge that you had chosen to become a sinner, a rebel, and now, in Christ's strength, you will persist in choosing, hour by hour, to exercise faith in Him, accepting all His provisions for your restoration, both at the cross and His present work wrought by

the person of the Holy Spirit whom you have invited to indwell you. This is what it means to believe in Jesus.

Different Approaches

Notice a few things about the conventional approach. First, it is not about processes; it is about events. It is not about a long flow of character development through a lifetime; it is about a brief list of acknowledgments. It is not about a thought-through understanding of what God has revealed in the Bible; it is about making a hasty decision under coercive pressure. How different is it to demand “say the right words or I will break your arm,” than to say “acknowledge Jesus as your personal Savior or burn in hell (for eternity)”? Finally, the conventional position is about making a deal that gets you into the kingdom; the biblical position is about becoming a fully realized human being and in the process giving one’s life as evidence that vindicates the character of God.

The biblical position thus deals with the issues of the Great Controversy; it is God-centered, while the conventional position could never offer any serious insights into the Great Controversy, and maintains an inevitable “man”-focus. Now let’s work our way through the biblical plan, idea by idea, Scripture by Scripture, and see how it gives us so much more help, yet remains simple.

Born With a Disordered Humanity

You, through no decision of your own, are a being born with a disordered human organism.

You have crooked teeth; one arm is longer than the other; your vision is better in your left eye than your right; you’re not good at mathematics; and you have trouble staying on pitch when

you sing. This description, or one very similar to it, describes virtually every one of us. In these ways we are very much alike. But these are only superficial, surface. Our humanity is far, far more disordered than what has just been described.

Adam and Eve committed very serious acts of rebellion. As a result, they were not able to pass on to us God's likeness in the way that it was originally granted. They were made in God's image, but their children inherited from them only the image of fallen humanity (Genesis 5:1, 3). Their original moral, intellectual and physical endowments were impacted. Their children and all who descended from them received a vitiated humanity, a bent nature, a decided inclination to self-indulgence, one so great that without intervention from God, although still desiring to do right, they would be unable to do right. God created our race very good (Genesis 1:31), upright (Ecclesiastes 7:29), but we sought out many inventions, we intentionally went astray (Isaiah 53:6). The result is that our humanity is disordered from the first, our faculties are scrambled, they do not function the way they were supposed to. Our very humanity clamors at us and screams to us and presents to us a feeling of great discomfort if we withhold from it that self-indulgence for which it pleads. Our own humanity is in opposition to us every minute, so that our life is an expression of madness (Ecclesiastes 9:3). We are part of the distorted world, and our lives testify to the dreadful destructiveness of sin and its results.

Our situation is like the blind man of Luke 18:37, 38. Jesus draws near, and when the blind understands that Christ is close by, he cries out, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!" It was not this man's fault that he was born blind. But there is One who can cure his blindness. Not based upon any works he might do, not because he might parrot back set phrases as if magic incantations—but simply on the basis of God's mercy. The human race on its own

has nothing to offer God. But He has something to offer us. He is passing by. Our plea is presented only on the basis of trust in His great mercy.

You Became a Sinner By Choice

Before you were equipped to make informed, intentional choices, you chose to act in harmony with the clammers of your disordered humanity. This is how you came to nurture attitudes of self-indulgence. Eventually you matured to a situation of moral accountability. But you trained yourself to be the consummate rebel; you chose to disobey. This is the situation of every human attaining to moral accountability—except Jesus—who has ever lived. Unless you act to break solidarity with these chosen inclinations, you will not be equipped to function in heaven and the new earth when the creation is restored to its intended order. Rather, you will be justly punished, your existence ended.

Some people think that the New Testament teaches a new insight about sin, namely that before we have intentionally chosen to transgress, we are already condemned for our very humanity. John Calvin is the most influential voice in the last 500 years who has taught this. He said

All are originally depraved.... Guilt is from nature.... Even infants bringing their condemnation with them from their mother's womb suffer... for their own defect.... Men are born vicious.... We are all sinners by nature (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, ch. 1, #5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 27).

Is this biblical? Do we bring our condemnation with us from our mother's womb? Paul, who supposedly teaches this, actually says that unborn children have done neither good nor evil (Romans 9:11). If they do neither good nor evil before they are born, can they bring either righteousness or guilt with them from the womb? No. Children are born with a disordered human organism but they are not responsible for that—or guilty for it.

How then do we become condemned? We choose to separate ourselves from God. Isaiah 59:2 is as clear as any text: “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.” Our choice to become rebels condemns us. Eventually, when we attain to a situation of moral accountability, we need not—but all do—choose to follow the inclinations already nurtured. We join ourselves in solidarity, we agree with, we second, we affirm, we grant our allegiance to, the clammers of the flesh, the relentless pull of our disordered human organism toward selfishness. Jesus is the only exception. As for us, Romans 3:23 declares our situation: “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” We all, then, need salvation.

Jesus, Our Example, Our Substitute

Because of God's love for us, a divine plan to restore the human race was put into operation. Jesus came in a humanity like your own so that He could present before fallen man an Example to pattern after, and die as a Substitute for you thus receiving the penalty that in justice would otherwise forever end your existence.

We did not launch the plan to save the human race. God did. But just as we differ radically with the conventional approach concerning what the problem is, here we differ radically from them about what the solution is. They see the human problem as your having a guilty nature; we see the problem as choosing to be a rebel. The weakened, disordered nature is indeed a mighty obstacle, but the supreme issue is how we choose to address the moral questions we face. In their view, Jesus can be no help to us as an example; He had a different kind of human nature than we do, a kind that is not innately guilty. Our nature is innately guilty. His overcoming then has few lessons for our overcoming.

We disagree. Genesis 3:15 contained a promise. The Father would send the “Seed of the woman,” His Son. Jesus would be a descendent of the woman, He would enter the human situation in the same kind of disordered human organism received by everyone downstream from Adam and Eve. Jesus would be wounded but would prevail. In our humanity He would live without sinning. While we were without strength, while we were unrepentant rebels, Jesus would come, a legitimate Substitute for us, and die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. But the only way He would have a legitimate offering there at the cross would be by living a sinless life, doing so in the same bent humanity as our own. Again to Paul as he explains:

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

The law written on stone could never save us, but the law written in flesh and blood, written in the humanity of Jesus Christ, could give for us. God’s law was a thumbnail description of Himself, but Jesus is God. The Father sent the Son for sin and condemned sin in the flesh. But how could He condemn sin in the flesh unless He overcomes it in the very flesh where it makes its home? What is His goal in all this? The example part. “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” With men this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. When we receive the help of His Holy Spirit, we are healed and He is glorified.

God made Him to be sin for us. Jesus knew no sin, that is, He never consented to it, never joined Himself to it, never coddled or played with it, never toyed with it or dabbled in it. On every—absolutely every—occasion of temptation, Jesus resisted, refused, declined to give His consent. Only because this is true do we have a Savior.

Faith Moment by Moment

You must repent, meaning to choose to make a complete and persistent change of direction. You acknowledge that you had chosen to become a sinner; a rebel, and now, in Christ's strength, you will persist hour by hour to exercise faith in Him, accepting all His provisions for your restoration, both at the cross and by the person of the Holy Spirit whom you permit to indwell you. This is believing in Jesus.

Repentance is more than mere acknowledgment. Of course, if your theological system says that your very nature is guilty, then you will have to change your definition of repentance. Unfortunately, this is exactly what many Christians have done. They have decided that repentance means stating, or even feeling, sorry for having sinned. Biblical repentance is far more. Biblical repentance means not only acknowledging having sinned, not only feeling sorry that you have sinned, but biblical repentance means actually to turn around and to forsake your sin and to do a "U-turn" going back in exactly the opposite direction than you had been going. When you disobeyed God you were moving in exactly the opposite direction from Him. When you actually repent you forsake your sin and you turn around and now you are moving exactly toward Him.

Because this has been so poorly understood, it is important to explain it further. Men are caught between two opposing powers.

On one side is the power of Satan, and he, with our consent, has trained us, in self-indulgence. The unconverted man is used to fulfilling the clamors and cravings of his distorted humanity. Born with a disordered humanity in which the various faculties do not function as designed, feeling trumps intellect, desire trumps reason. Where reason says there are no shortcuts, the man ruled by his own spirit fools himself into thinking that he can escape consequences. He has the equipment he needs to think with clarity, to choose morally, but it is in an awful mess from

disuse, misuse, and self-deception. For all intents and purposes, man left to himself embraces a satanic, adversarial orientation towards that which is just and right.

On the other side is the power of God, the Holy Spirit who works to bring man to where he may exercise the option of choosing freedom. And yet, the choice always remains that of the man. Whereas our trained-to-indulgence nature ever seeks to force itself upon us, the Holy Spirit is a person, and He refuses to use force to make men do what is right. He leads, He encourages, He prompts, but never compels the believer. He has power to give us in our moment of need, but He will not force us to take it. Man finds himself prompted and provoked by these two powers. The choice remains his own.

How we value sin and how we value righteousness are crucial. Every decision means acting to embrace the values of Satan's government or acting to embrace the values of God's government. There is a scale of values held by each person. On one side is the act of sin with its attendant satisfaction; on the other, the act of righteousness with its attendant satisfaction. Part of the effective exercise of repentance involves the tearing down of self-deceptions. The process of thought we tend to engage in when we are weighing these potential acts, is to focus exclusively on the immediate satisfactions without including in the equation the other attendants that accompany our sins. For when we sin, we incur also to ourselves an awful sense of self-disgust, loathing, self-hatred, personal devaluation, censure, condemnation, guilt, hopelessness, self-hatred, and self-destruction. These are incurred on a very personal basis. We become our own accusers. And we know we are justly accused.

But we must train ourselves also to the habit of weighing the blessedness of the good we may choose instead. For when we are tempted to do wrong and instead choose the good, then

the satisfaction we receive includes peace, contentment, a sense of harmony with God, a satisfaction that we have pleased Him, a sense of humble growth and maturity. It is when we choose Heaven's ways that we understand Paul who said, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11). When we view all of the transaction of sin and all of the transaction of righteousness, when we have learned to put away our self-deceptions and look on things as God looks on them, then our sense of personal satisfaction will be beyond description. In humility we enjoy that in some tiny, unique way, we have acted a part in the conflict between good and evil; through the power of God we have demonstrated that creatures of fallen flesh may serve Him, even have part in His vindication. And yet, all the glory is His own, for there is in this no merit for us, only the knowledge that we acted for righteousness because He was merciful to us, granting to us His grace that we might so act.

Repentance means choosing a different way than we have inclined ourselves to. It means something very different from the conventional view. One of the best passages helping us with repentance is found in Ezekiel 18:26-32.

When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal [fair]. O house of Israel, are not My ways equal [fair]? are not your ways unequal [unfair]? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

Repentance is turning. It becomes obvious here that there is no falsification of repentance with God. He is not mocked. What a man sows he will also reap. God is no respecter of persons. He is unerringly fair. He will empower us to turn but it remains we who must act to embrace His strength. It is we who must turn, otherwise there is no free choice, no free will, and the sin problem as God has chosen to address it means absolutely nothing. Then it is a 6,000 year sham, a play in which we are all marionettes, puppets, wax figures and robots, wind up toys for Deity. No! Rather, He grants us free choice and then enlists our free choice. Will we serve Him because of the mercy and justice of His character? The watching universe wants to know. And they will know. Our lives are the test case. Earth is the laboratory.

Jesus and His disciples also preached that God was calling on all men everywhere to repent (Mark 6:12). So how do you live by faith? It is as simple as 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We must bring our failures to God. We must approach Him when we have sinned and tell Him what we have done. He already knows that we have done it, but for our own psyche it is important for us to tell Him that we have sinned, to acknowledge that we are guilty for it, condemned, and to choose to forsake utterly the sin. And He will answer. His forgiveness is no merely legal matter. When we confess and when our heart is pleading for true deliverance, He gives it. His forgiveness does not come as a half-measure. When He forgives, He cleanses us from sin—completely. He cleanses us from not some, but all unrighteousness. It is only on these terms that His forgiveness is available.

So here we can see how the only real kind of repentance is the confess and forsake kind. The Proverb is unerringly correct: “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso con-

fesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Ezekiel 18 and 1 John agree together. Man may repent. Man may turn. Man may receive cleansing, not only his chosen guilt but from all His chosen unrighteousness.

How can this be true? We feel so weak! Just here we remember the case, not only of Jesus passing by the blind man who pled, “Jesus Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me,” but also the case of the man with the demon possessed child.

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief (Mark 9:23, 24).

Isn't this an important text for us? After all, we believe. But we know we need help in believing. It is not really God that many of us doubt; it is ourselves.

If in yourself you see the weakness, know that this simple plea is for you: “I believe; help my unbelief!” Our God wants you in the kingdom (Luke 12:32). It makes the Divine Being happy, it gives Him pleasure, when you come toward Him.

One Last Problem

Some of us have long histories of rebellion and sin and failure. Violation of conscience warps our thinking so that we feel as if despite God's assurances to us, we cannot be sure of His salvation. But that is not the question. As long as we have free will we will always be able to choose righteousness or sin, God's way, or Satan's. It is the wrong question. Nor need we ask whether or not God loves us. We know He loves us. What we need to remember is that He does love us this way. Two texts especially help us.

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him (1 John 4:16).

If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things (1 John 3:20).

You need to come to the place where you know and believe God's love for you. In the beginning there will be doubts. But when you dwell upon the simple stories of Jesus in the gospels, you will know that His care is for you, His love reaches out to you, that, were you in the same situations as those He met in the gospels, that He would act the same way towards you. Then there is the fact that you feel tainted by your past sins. Your heart condemns you. Even when you have sought forgiveness—and received it—Satan will press upon your soul a sense of guilt. But you need to learn to trust His love and His faithfulness more than you distrust yourself. He is greater than us. His weighing of the situation is never wrong. He never forgets your plea for forgiveness and He never forgets that He has granted it. Feelings of self-condemnation do not overrule facts of God's forgiveness. If you have addressed a matter with the Lord and He has forgiven you, then believe because He has promised and go forward. This is all you need. You have a Savior who embraces you. You have, as Luther said, the right Man on your side. You have all the hope that is in Christ.

Conclusion

Are you “saved”? You can know you are walking with God right now and that you have eternal life right now. But being “saved” is not about saying yes to a list of faulty propositions someone wrote out long ago. It is not even about saying yes to a list of accurate propositions, although that never hurts. The real question is not, am I standing with, but, am I walking with Jesus? It is not, am I doomed because of Adam and by saying magic words I win the heavenly

lottery, but whether I am willing to choose to resist my distorted humanity and let God remake me into a fully realized human in His image.

Do not pity the man who comes to you and wants you to make an instant decision to “be saved.” Rejoice that he loves God and aims to serve him. But God has shown you more. God calls you to a biblical understanding. You need not agree with John Calvin, friend, in order to be “saved.” You need to agree with Jesus. You do not need one super-sized, irreversible event, one one-time-for-all choice in which you choose Christ and lose for eternity free will. God does not take away your free will, but educates you in how to exercise it. Day in and day out you learn to choose to serve God. Becoming a sinner is a process, and becoming a righteous person is a process too. Keep near your Bible. Neglect not prayer. In the helping strength of God exercise kindness toward others. Turn from sin, learning to measure the whole package of destruction against the whole package of peace. Soon you will realize that there is no profit in sin whatsoever. Purify yourself even as He is pure, and you will know the peace of God which cannot be described in words. Jesus says shalom to you. And smiles.