

Understanding
SALVATION

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UNDERSTANDING SALVATION

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Contents

Preface 7

Lesson 1 Divine Authority and Human Accountability 9

Lesson 2 The Consequences of Sin 19

Lesson 3 Jesus Is the Only Savior 29

Lesson 4 The Benefits of Salvation 39

Lesson 5 Salvation's Terminology 49

Lesson 6 Salvation Is Forever 57

Wrap-up 67

Bibliography 68

Answers 69

Preface

Good news makes the heart leap for joy. When we learn that a kidnapped child has been found and returned to his or her parents, we rejoice. We rejoice, too, when we hear that a hostage has been freed from terrorists. We consider this news good because we value life. However, the best “good news” concerns the rescue of a soul from sin, the Devil, and eternal condemnation. Even the angels of Heaven rejoice over this remarkable deliverance (Luke 15:10).

Yes, the good news of salvation is joyful and significant, but how clearly do we grasp and appreciate it? Unless we understand it well, we can neither appreciate it appropriately nor share it spontaneously.

The lessons in this book are designed to explain salvation clearly. If we comprehend salvation as God’s amazing work of delivering us from sin and setting us free, we will surely say with Paul, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15). And we will spread this good news joyfully.



LESSON 1

Divine Authority and Human Accountability

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

When did we first recognize authority? Were we six or seven months old? Mom commanded, “Don’t spit your food at me!” We may not have thought, *Mom’s an authority figure*, but we were beginning to grasp the concept. As we grew older, our understanding of authority grew. We recognized that our parents, teachers, and crossing guards had a vested right to demand our respect and obedience.

As adults, we recognize authority and know we are accountable to comply with the rules and regulations of that authority. We report to an authority figure at work. If we fail

We should also be grateful that we have an income and the opportunity to help meet the costs of living in a free nation.

to perform according to his or her demands, we may join the ranks of the unemployed. Recognizing civil authority, we stop when a traffic light is red or we come to a stop sign. We drive at or below the posted speed limit. If we fail to obey the rules of the road, we quickly recognize the authority of the officer who pulls us over. We may wince at the amount of income tax deducted from our paychecks, but we recognize the government's authority to exact its "pound of flesh."

So we are not strangers to the concept of authority, but do we understand clearly that God's authority far exceeds all other spheres of authority? Indeed, no other authority would exist apart from His permission. The apostle Paul wrote: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers [authorities]. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1).

1. Read Romans 13:2. What does this verse teach about resisting divinely established authority?

2. Read Daniel 4:30–37.
 - (a) What powerful king learned the hard way to acknowledge God's infinite authority?

- (b) How long did it take him to learn his lesson (v. 32)?

“Times” means “years.”

GOD’S AUTHORITY IS INFINITE

The book of Job unfolds a heartrending story of a man whose faith, tested under fire, passed the test. Job did not comprehend why God allowed trial after trial to pummel his faith, but he did not question God’s right to do so. Near the end of the book, we read that God comforted Job by giving him a clearer understanding of His wisdom and authority. God assured Job that He alone had laid the foundations of the earth and had created all things by His mighty power and wisdom (Job 38; 39). He identified Himself to Job as “the Almighty” and suggested that no one can legitimately question His actions (40:2). This revelation of God’s uncontestable authority caused Job to marvel. “I know thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee,” he said (42:2). Stricken with the wonder of God’s lofty being and infinite authority, Job confessed his sinfulness (v. 6).

Job’s trials were not intended to punish Job, but to prove the genuineness of his faith (Job 1:6–12). Similarly, trials prove the genuineness of our faith (1 Peter 1:6, 7).

3. Read Isaiah 40:12–25.

- (a) Who instructed God when He created all things?

(b) How much greater is God's authority than the authority of all the nations of the world?

(c) According to Isaiah 40:25, does God have an equal?

Created in the image of God, our first parents reflected God's nature. They possessed intelligence, rationality, emotions, and spirituality. Until they sinned, they lived in a state of innocence and enjoyed fellowship with God.

GOD EXERCISED HIS AUTHORITY IN EDEN

Let's journey back to the sixth day of creation. After creating everything else and pronouncing it "good," God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, in His own image (Genesis 1:27). Furthermore, He placed them in an idyllic environment, the Garden of Eden. This paradise afforded all the pleasures, beauty, and comfort the human heart could experience. Everything about Adam and Eve's home was perfect.

However, God withheld one thing from them to test their love for Him and their willingness to submit to His authority. He told them they could eat freely "of every tree of the garden" (2:16). But He prohibited them from eating from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (v. 17).

4. According to Genesis 2:17, what would happen to Adam and Eve if they violated God's command?

LUCIFER CONTESTED GOD'S AUTHORITY

Sometime before God prohibited Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a rebellion against His authority broke out in Heaven. Isaiah 14:12–15 reports that an angel named Lucifer tried to exalt himself. As we read this passage, we notice how boastfully Lucifer asserted self-will. Five times he insisted “I will,” but his arrogance unleashed divine judgment.

This light-bearing angel became “the prince of darkness.” Although he still has access to Heaven, where he accuses believers before God’s throne (Revelation 12:10), he forfeited his proximity to God’s throne. Now earth’s atmosphere is his domicile and domain (Ephesians 2:2; 6:12). Ultimately he will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10).

5. According to Isaiah 14:13 and 14, what did Lucifer boast he would do?

6. What did God say would happen to Lucifer (v. 15)?

After rebelling against God’s authority,

*“Lucifer” means
“bright star” or
“shining one.”*

When the Devil tempted Jesus, he offered Him all the kingdoms of the world if He would fall down and worship him (Matthew 4:8, 9). Although Jesus rejected this offer, He did not deny the Devil's claim of ownership.

Revelation 12:9 calls the Devil "that old serpent" and "Satan."

"Subtil" (v. 1) means "cunning," or "crafty."

Lucifer the Devil, also known as Satan, entered human history and tried to sabotage God's plans for the human race. His goal was to wrest Adam and Eve's allegiance from God and divert it to himself. To this day, his determination to hold sway over the minds and hearts of human beings remains ironclad. The apostle Paul wrote that the Devil ("the god of this world") "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The apostle John described the whole world of unbelievers as lying under the influence of the Wicked One (1 John 5:19).

OUR FIRST PARENTS DEFIED GOD'S AUTHORITY

One day Satan entered the serpent, the craftiest creature in the Garden of Eden, and initiated a conversation with Eve. We do not know whether Adam was tending to another part of the Garden or was close by, but we do know Satan caught Eve's attention and asked her a startling question: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1).

With this question, Satan stabbed right at the heart of God's authority. He intimated that God had no right to make such a demand and that the prohibition was unfair. He did not point out how generous and kind God was to grant Adam and Eve access to all the other trees. He drew Eve's focus to the one tree God had marked off limits.

Today, too, Satan tries to make people think they would miss out on something if they bowed to God's authority. Of course, Satan is both a liar and a deceiver (John 8:44; Revelation 12:9).

7. In your opinion, what does Satan lead people to think they will miss if they submit to God's authority?

8. What popular philosophies do you see as tools in Satan's hands to blind unbelievers to the truth?

Eve's response in Genesis 3:2 and 3 shows how she twisted what God had said. Twisting God's Word is an act of rebellion against His authority. To submit to His Word is to submit to His authority!

9. Compare Genesis 2:17 and 3:3. What statement did Eve add to God's prohibition?

Some theologians teach that we sinned in Adam in the sense that we were seminally in him. Others teach that Adam was the federal head of the human race, so his transgression plunged the entire human race into sin. Of course, because Adam and Eve became sinners by defying God's authority, they could beget only children who were sinners.

UNDERSTANDING SALVATION

Irreversibly opposed to God, Satan contradicted His Word. God had warned that Adam and Eve would die if they violated His prohibition. “Ye shall not surely die,” Satan hissed (Genesis 3:4). Then he moved in for the kill by telling Eve that the forbidden fruit would elevate her to a state of deity (v. 5).

Perceiving the tree to be “good for food,” “pleasant to the eyes,” and “desired to make one wise,” Eve plucked it from the tree, sank her teeth into it, and “gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (v. 6).

The trap slammed shut. Our first parents had succumbed to temptation—Eve through deception and Adam through clear choice. Together they had defied God’s authority, and God would hold them accountable.

We, too, have defied God’s authority and sinned. Romans 5:19 declares, “By one man’s [Adam’s] disobedience many were made sinners.”

10. Read Matthew 4:1–11. How did Satan’s appeal to Jesus resemble the way he appealed to, or tempted, Eve?

11. How did the results of these temptations differ?

12. What do you learn from these incidents of temptation about the importance of submitting to God’s authority?

As we shall see in lesson 2, Adam and Eve bore the consequences of their sin, and all their descendants share those consequences.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. Read Isaiah 53:6 and Romans 3:23. Why can’t we blame Adam and Eve for all the wickedness we see around us?
2. How would you respond to someone who insists God has no right to run his or her life?
3. What is your opinion of the slogan, “Question authority”? Does it remind you of what Isaiah 14:12–15 reports? Why or why not?

First Timothy 2:14 declares, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” Romans 5:12 teaches that “by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world.”

