

What Does it Mean to “Believe in Jesus” as a Means to Salvation?

Description

A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 2nd Quarter
The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant
Week 5
by Mary Zebrowski
Edited by Trent Wilde

This week’s lesson is entitled, “Children of the Promise,” and discusses how all the families of the earth were to be blessed through Abraham’s seed. Tuesday’s lesson is entitled, “The Messianic Promise: Part 1,” and discusses how the covenant promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who came from the seed of Abraham. Tuesday’s lesson reads,

“No question, the covenant promise of the world’s Savior is the greatest of all God’s promises. The Redeemer Himself becomes the means by which the obligations of the covenant arrangement are met and all of its other promises are realized. All, Jew or Gentile, who enter into union with Him are accounted as Abraham’s true family and inheritors of the promise (Gal. 3:8, 9, 27–29)—that is, the promise of eternal life in a sinless environment where evil, pain, and suffering will never again arise. Can you think of a better promise than that?” Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson, Tuesday, April 26, 2021

So today we are going to discuss some nuances concerning this statement, in particular, how are we going to have a sinless life in “eternity” where evil, pain and suffering will never arise again?

Many think that Jesus will do something “supernatural” to our hearts and minds when He returns to get us – that at that time He will “fix” us somehow. Coupled with this idea is typically the thought that simply “believing in” Jesus will be enough to get us into Heaven when Christ returns.

So, let’s first ask, “What does it mean to ‘believe in Jesus’ as it relates to salvation?”

Well, lets go over what it certainly does not mean.

We know, first of all, that salvation does not come from “believing in” God’s or Jesus’ existence.

Take for example this verse in the book of James, which reads,

You believe that God is one. Good for you! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. James 2:19

And this verse in Luke,

And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of God!” And He, rebuking *them*, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ. Luke 4:41

So, we can clearly see, according to these two verses, that demons believe, and even confess, that God exists and that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and this does not cause them to be “saved,” and it just follows that it wouldn’t in our cases either.

Another way some understand “believing in Jesus” as the means to salvation is to believe that Jesus’ righteousness is a substitute for our righteousness. But the problem here is that scripture never claims this. On the contrary, to have the righteousness of Christ, or the faith of Jesus, is to have the same righteousness and faith that Jesus has.

Let’s look at a few verses to evidence this.

1 John 3:6 reads,

Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. 1 John 3:6

And Romans 6:6-12 reads,

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Romans 6:6-12

Notice here Paul says that we are not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies! We must become righteous before we can receive our immortal bodies at the return of Christ. We are to have the same righteousness as that of Christ. We are to live like Christ and die like Christ – which is to never under any circumstance give in to the temptation to sin. The scriptures do not promote the idea that we receive a vicarious righteousness through Christ, nor that at Christ’s return something supernatural will happen to our hearts and minds to eradicate sin in our heart. We are to put away our sins today, while in our mortal bodies, and live like Christ did, because when our probation closes, it will be too late.

Ellen White said,

“The righteousness of Christ will not cover one cherished sin. A man may be a law-breaker in heart; yet if he commits no outward act of transgression, he may be regarded by the world as possessing great integrity. But God’s law looks into the secrets of the heart. Every act is judged by the motives that prompt it. Only that which is in accord with the principles of God’s law will stand in the judgment.” Ellen White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 316

When you think about it, to see someone as righteous even though they are harboring sin in their hearts is nothing short of falsehood! How could a sinless God of truth promise us eternal life in “a sinless environment where evil, pain, and suffering will never again arise” if the criteria for entrance into this environment is based on falsehood?

So we can see this second understanding of salvation through “believing in Jesus” also does not hold water.

Thirdly, some think that “believing in Jesus” as the means to salvation is to believe that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins (past, present, and future) by suffering and dying on the cross for us. Many believe this from the misunderstanding of what it meant for Jesus to “bear our sins.” As we went over in one of our previous videos entitled, “Jesus Came to ‘Bear With’ Our Sins, Not to Take Responsibility for Them,” Jesus did not come to vicariously pay some sort of death penalty God had leveled against us because of our sin. This would imply that God is actually at peace with our hopelessly sinful hearts and is appeased in His wrath against sin and sinners now that His Son has been brutally murdered. When we allow ourselves to state this common doctrine in frank terms, it becomes obvious how ridiculous it sounds and it shows that it is definitely no solution for the sin problem in our hearts, and also will not lead to an “eternal life in a sinless environment where evil, pain, and suffering will never again arise.”

We could really look to the same bible verses and the Ellen White quote previously mentioned to upend this idea as well, as they clearly show that after the cross, sin is still evil in the sight of God, and to continue in sin is to not really know Jesus Christ at all. The crucifixion did not change anything in that regard.

But additionally, we could look to 1 Corinthians 2:7-8 to see that this idea that God ordained Jesus to die because punishment and death is necessary to counterbalance sin on the scale of cosmic justice simply does not line up with scripture.

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 reads,

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 1 Corinthians 2:7-8

So, here Paul is saying that it was not wise to crucify Jesus. Also, in Acts 2:36-39, Peter informs the crowd gathered around him at Pentecost that their crucifixion of Jesus calls for deep repentance. And in Acts 7:51-54, Stephen flat out accuses his audience of betraying and murdering Jesus. The crowd becomes angry and then proceeds to stone Stephen. Stephen paid the ultimate price for speaking the truth.

You see, Jesus did pay the price for our sins, but not in the way most preachers today have led us to believe. He did so by willingly subjecting himself to our sinful hearts, minds, and actions in order to show us the truth about His Father and about sin – it was not to give us a “get out of jail free” card by taking our punishment while we continue committing crimes. Jesus came to earth to be with us in order to reveal the nature of His Father to us (See John 17:4) and to preach to us about truth and righteousness (See Mark 1:36). Unfortunately, the only way to accomplish this was to subject himself to the sin in this sin sick world, which ultimately led to his torture and death.

How do most Christians today have such misconceptions concerning these things? It is from cherry picking a bible verse out of its context in order to have it say something it was never intended to say. Ellen White objected to people cherry picking her statements out of their original context as well. This is a favorite tactic of Satan’s. When reading an author’s message, it is only right and fair to read the entire message in order to understand the intended meaning of any one sentence. If you come across a verse that you might think is saying that our sin is okay in any way, shape, or form, you need to keep reading. The prophetic authors of scripture writing by the power of the Holy Spirit never justify sin – not before the cross, and not after the cross.

So, what does it mean to “believe in Jesus” as a means to salvation? And what then is the solution to the sin problem?

Well, to “believe in Jesus” is to trust in what He is saying to us. It is to gain a knowledge about Him that is so deep that we will have faith (trust based on evidence) in His ways! If we “believe in Him,” we will follow in His footsteps and will then be determined, moment by moment, to not give into temptation to sin ever again, and therefore receive the promise of eternal life in “a sinless environment where evil, pain, and suffering will never again arise.” Can you think of a better promise than that?

For more on overcoming sin in our lives and the true solution to the sin problem, please see our studies, “[The Lost Gospel of Christ](#),” by [Trent Wilde](#), the section of our FAQ page entitled, “[Our Understanding of Morality](#),” and our video study, “[The Gospel is Better Than Most Realize](#).”