

INFANT SALVATION

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Introductory Note: According to Pastor Nolen, much of the material in this paper is based on the book, *Heaven for Those Who Can't Believe*, by Robert P. Lightner.

When an infant dies, can we as Christians assure the grieving family that their precious little one is now with their Father in heaven? No doubt most Christians would answer yes to this question, though they may not be able to quote many Bible verses to prove it. I also answer yes, and what follows is an attempt to show biblical support for such an answer.

First we will look at some of what the Bible teaches about salvation in general.

ALL ARE LOST IN SIN

When David said, "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5, KJV¹), he was describing not just himself but all of us. The clear teaching of Scripture is that all are sinners.

As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. (Rom. 3:10-11, KJV)

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. (Rom. 5:12, NASB)

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jer. 17:9, KJV)

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23, KJV)

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins. (Eph. 2:1, NASB)

It is sometimes said, and it is true, that we are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. Paul reminds the believers at Ephesus that ". . . we . . . were by nature the children of wrath . . ." (Eph. 2:3, KJV).

So we see that we were not born innocent and ready for heaven, but lost in sin and therefore in need of a Saviour.

1 All Scripture citations identified as "KJV" are taken from the slightly revised KJV in *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, gen. ed. E. Schuyler English (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

SALVATION IS IN CHRIST ALONE

It is also the clear teaching of Scripture that the only way of salvation is through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. He is the Saviour that we all need. His blood paid the penalty for our sin, and for the sins of all.²

And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2, KJV)

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6, KJV)

Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12, KJV)

But God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8, KJV)

Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed. (1 Pet. 2:25, KJV)

We see from these verses that it is the death of Christ that makes it possible for us to be saved. He died in our place. There is now and always has been only one way of salvation, and that is through the blood of Jesus Christ.

SALVATION IS BY FAITH ALONE

So the line of reasoning is something like this: all have sinned, and the penalty for sin is death; therefore all must die. (We are looking at spiritual death, viz., separation from God.) But when we believe that Jesus died in our place and that his blood paid the penalty for our sin, we have eternal life. There is nothing that we can do to gain this life except repent of our sin and receive God's free gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24, KJV)

² **Special Note:** This Web site is committed to Calvinism in the theological doctrine of salvation (called soteriology in systematic theology). On this specific point, Pastor Nolen does not take a Calvinistic view in what is called the extent of the atonement. The Arminian position is that Christ died to *provide* salvation for all, while the Calvinistic view is that he died to *secure* salvation for the elect. However, this distinction does not weaken the general, overall strength of the arguments Pastor Nolen presents in this paper. (Ken Morgan)

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. (Acts 16:31, KJV)

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13, KJV)

Because it is such a commonly accepted truth, there is no need to list verse after verse to show that salvation is by God's grace and only through faith in Christ.

For by grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God--Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Eph. 2:8-9, KJV)

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

We now come to the main subject under consideration: what is the eternal state of infants who, because of their lack of mental ability, cannot believe? One dictionary defines "infant" as "a very young child, a baby." The definition of "child" is broader: "an infant; an unborn offspring, fetus; a boy or girl in the period before puberty; a son or daughter offspring."

There are several more definitions listed, but for our consideration we will use the term child or children, and mean by this, *one who is not yet mentally old enough to know right from wrong.*

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR CHILDREN

"Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world," so the song says. The Bible verifies this truth. In Matthew 18:1-14 Jesus is teaching His disciples about humility. He sets a little child before them and says, "Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:4, KJV). He continues by saying, "And whosoever shall receive one such child in my name receiveth me" (Matt. 18:5, KJV). Further along in this lesson Jesus says, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10, KJV). At the close of this lesson Jesus says, "Even so it is not the will of your Father, who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14, KJV).

Of course much could be said about this passage, but for our consideration note these three things:

1. Jesus uses the little child as an example of how one should be (like a little child) to enter into the kingdom of heaven. That would seem strange if the child is not going to be there.
2. Verse 10 seems to teach that certain angels who have a special closeness to the

Father himself are watching over these little ones. Thus no one should despise the little children, and in this context they do not seem to be seen as eternally lost.

3. Since angels are watching over them and it is said to be the will of our Father in heaven that none of them should perish, it seems to follow that none of them will perish.

Other passages indicate that Jesus had a special love for the little children. He never hints in His teaching about them that they will be cast into hell.

Then there were brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Permit little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed from there. (Matt. 19:13-15, KJV)

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Permit the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter into it. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16, KJV)

And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them; but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Permit little children to come to me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God like a little child shall in no way enter it. (Luke 18:15-17, KJV)

The love and affection that Jesus had for children is very obvious in these Scriptures. He never condemns them, but instead blesses them. It seems incongruous that He would send them to hell if they should die at this early age.

DAVID AND HIS SON

One passage of Scripture on this subject that often comes to mind is 2 Samuel 12:15-23. Here the child that was born to David and Bath-sheba became very sick and died. David mourned and fasted while the child was ill, but after the child died he washed himself and ate. When questioned about his strange actions, David replied,

While the child was alive I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. (2 Sam. 12:22, KJV)

There is no doubt that David knew where he was going after death, for he wrote in another place, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in

the house of the LORD forever" (Ps. 23:6, KJV).

If David and the child were going to be together, it would have to be in heaven. The idea that David had in mind simply that he would some day follow his child in death and they would be together in that they would both be dead would seem to be of little and rather strange comfort to the present need of the heart of a grieving father.

THE BASIS FOR JUDGMENT

The Bible teaches that all whose names are not found in the Book of Life are judged and cast into the lake of fire.

And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades delivered up the dead that were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works.
(Rev. 20:13, KJV)

The point I want to emphasize here is that the basis for this judgment is "every man according to their works." It is obvious that children (before they know right from wrong) have no works to be judged and therefore are not included in this judgment.

Also we should consider why these people are in this judgment at all. The answer is found in this verse:

He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
(John 3:18, KJV)

Here it is seen that condemnation comes as a result of unbelief. It seems reasonable to think that this is written about people who have the mental capacity to reason and excludes those who do not.

WHO SINGS THE NEW SONG?

What a day it will be when the redeemed of all ages are together in heaven singing in worshipful praise the glory of our Lord Jesus. Here is a picture of that scene.

And they sang a new song, saying Worthy are Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth. (Rev. 5:9-10, NASB)

No doubt there are many "tribes" and "nations" that have gone out of existence without a single adult believer among them. I cannot think of any way that the above could be fulfilled unless it includes the children in such tribes who died before the age of accountability.

SALVATION IS AN ACT OF GOD'S GRACE

Salvation is God's free gift, an act of His grace. Works have no part in it.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5, KJV)

We have already said that salvation is by faith alone. Now take a closer look at faith. Do we need to be reminded that it is not our faith that saves us? It is the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross that pays the penalty for our sins. Our faith adds nothing to the redemptive work of Christ. Faith is the avenue by which His finished work is applied to our own personal need. The great invitation in the Scripture is this:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (Isa. 1:18, KJV)

It seems obvious that this and the many other invitations to trust or believe in Christ are given to those who have the mental ability to respond.

Even the faith to believe comes from God, not from within ourselves. He gives it to us. He cannot give faith to those who do not have the mental capacity to receive it. But this lack of mental capacity does not diminish the completed work of Christ on their behalf. Jesus died for them, just as He died for the sins of all men of all ages.³

All men are responsible for the light that God has given them. Even those who have never heard the gospel of Christ are responsible for God's revelation of Himself in creation, and they will be judged for rejecting this revelation (Rom. 1:20). But it seems inconsistent with our understanding of God to say that He judges people according to light that they do not have the mental capacity to receive. In fact, as far as I can determine, all of the warnings of hell, and judgment, and the eternal condition of the lost are addressed to people who have the mental ability to accept or reject the message. (Of course acceptance cannot come apart from the convicting and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit.)

As has been stated above, faith does not pay for our sin. Christ has done that. The debt has been completely paid. Robert Lightner states his conclusion on the matter like this:

What of those who can't believe? My answer is, since the price has been paid in full, until it is rejected, the debt is canceled.⁴ Therefore, God can receive into His presence

3 **Special Note:** Again, a Calvinist would stop at the comma of this sentence: "Jesus died for them [the children who had not yet reached the age of accountability]. Pastor Nolen's argument stands just as strong without the addition, "just as He died for the sins of all men of all ages." Jesus died to secure salvation for the elect, and as Charles Spurgeon argued, those little children who die are part of the elect of God. (Ken Morgan)

4 **Special Note:** A Calvinist does not believe the Scriptures teach that "the price has been paid in full"

all who did not receive His Son by faith because they could not do so. Without violating His righteous demands in any way these are accepted into His presence. After all, His righteous demands were met at Calvary. The debt has been paid! Jesus paid it all! No more is owed to God. Those who can and do believe do not contribute anything toward the debt of sin by their faith. God's requirement of faith from man is never viewed in Scripture as part of the payment towards man's debt. The debt of sin is only charged against those who reject the payment God the Son has made and God the Father has accepted. All those who can't believe owe no more to God. Those who can believe and do not [believe,] owe the full debt; that is why they cannot go to heaven. Their debt can never be paid by man. To refuse Christ's payment is to seal one's eternal destiny, but to be unable to receive it is to be covered by the payment already made and accepted by God.⁵

So my conclusion of the matter is this. I believe that it is consistent with biblical teaching and also very appropriate for Christians to offer spiritual encouragement to parents grieving over the loss of their child. Moreover, I do not believe that this conclusion depends on whether the parents themselves are Christians.

for *everyone* "until it is rejected." Neither is that idea necessary to sustain the main thesis and the general argumentation of this paper. The price has been paid in full for those infants and little children who die because they are included in the elect of God. (Ken Morgan)

5 Robert P. Lightner, *Heaven for Those Who Can't Believe* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1977), pp. 25-26.