

The Three Tenses of Salvation

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, [present tense – you are saved from the power of sin and false doctrine] if ye **keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.**

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

The three tenses of salvation:

Past – were saved from the penalty of sin

Present – are saved from the power of sin and false doctrine

Future – will be saved from the presence of sin

The above passage teaches that if you have received (believed by faith) the gospel that Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again the third day, you were (past tense), at that time, eternally saved from the penalty of sin, will be (future tense) saved from the presence of sin when you get to heaven, and are (present tense) saved from the power of sin and false doctrine now as you keep in memory what it is that you believed, so that you won't have believed in vain (when it comes to your Christian walk).

Verse 2 has troubled many a Christian by seeming to suggest that they must continue to believe a certain way to remain saved from the penalty of sin or their faith is in vain. What the verse is really saying can be twofold:

First, is that the power of sin, now, will be lessened to the extent that you keep in memory what Christ did for you that paid the penalty for your sins and that will provide a sin-free environment for you in heaven someday. It has been a universal truth that memorized Scripture guards against sin:

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

(Psalms 119:11)

Paul was inspired to write that even our faith and doctrine should lead to godliness:

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness;

(Titus 1:1)

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, [even] the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; (I Timothy 6:3)

Secondly, verse 2 could include being “delivered” from error or false doctrine if one keeps in memory what is stated in verses 3 & 4 concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

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In checking the Greek for verse 2 the words “are saved” are in the present tense, in all available texts, verifying that Paul was inspired to write concerning the “power of sin” in verse 2. In fact, the whole verse is identical in all the Greek texts:

2 δι ου και σωζεσθε τινι λογω ευηγγελισαμην υμιν ει κατεχετε εκτος ει μη εικη επιστευσατε (Textus Receptus Greek Text)

2 δι ου και σωζεσθε τινι λογω ευηγγελισαμην υμιν ει κατεχετε εκτος ει μη εικη επιστευσατε (Majority Greek Text)

2 δι ου και σωζεσθε τινι λογω ευηγγελισαμην υμιν ει κατεχετε εκτος ει μη εικη επιστευσατε (Wescott Hort Greek Text)

² δι' οὐ καὶ σώζεσθε, τίνι λόγῳ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν εἰ κατέχετε, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ εἰκὴ ἐπιστεύσατε.

(Nestle-Aland 26th edition/United Bible Societies' third edition Greek Text)

Current word	
Inflected form:	σώζεσθε
Base form:	σώζω
Major1:	verb – save (Strong's: 4982)
Person:	2nd
Tense:	present
Voice:	passive
Mood:	indicative
Number:	plural

Also, you will notice that the word translated “if” in our verse 2 is the Greek word “εἰ” which, grammatically speaking, is a primary particle of conditionality that could be translated “forasmuch as” as it is in the book of Acts, chapter 11, verse 17:

Forasmuch (Greek: “εἰ”) then **as** God gave them the like gift as [He did] unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

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If this were done it would indicate that the writer was acknowledging that they *were keeping* in memory what Christ had done for them to be saved (or delivered) from the power of sin (or false doctrine) now, rather than warning them to be sure *to keep* in memory what He had done for them going forward, if they wanted to be saved (or delivered) from the power of sin (or false doctrine).

A stronger Greek word for “if” is: ean (ἔαν) and as it is used below it has more the idea of a definite “if” and could have been used by the Holy Spirit in I Corinthians 15:2.

For circumcision verily profiteth, if (Gr: ἔαν) thou keep the law: but if (Gr: εἰ) thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. (Romans 2:25)

It's sad to think about but some Christians believe the Gospel and become sanctified saints, but stop there and soon their memory fades and they fall back into a similar mode that they were in prior to receiving salvation. In the first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 2, the Apostle Paul addresses: “**the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called [to be] saints,**” but look what has happened to them by chapter 3:

1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, [even] as unto babes in Christ.

2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able [to bear it], neither yet now are ye able.

3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas [there is] among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I [am] of Apollos; are ye not carnal? (I Corinthians 3:1-4)

In Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 13, Paul explains why we need to: “**all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:**”

He goes on to say in verse 14:

That we [henceforth] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, [and] cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

No matter how you view our passage from I Corinthians 15:1-4, “if” (or) “forasmuch as” you understand the blessings of the three tenses of salvation, you have the clearest expression of the Gospel of the Grace of God found in Scripture. Arm yourself with it and you will have an effective tool for sharing the easily understandable method whereby anyone can be saved from all manner of sin!

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