

The Three Tenses of Salvation

Let's begin with a "pop" quiz. Multiple choice.

Which answer best describes your relationship with the Lord?

- a. I have been saved.
- b. I am being saved.
- c. I will be saved.
- d. all of the above.

Of course, the correct answer for all born-again children of God is "d. all of the above. "

I have been saved.

At the point of conversion, you were justified and regenerated, redeemed by the blood of Christ. Therefore, you *have been* saved. You *have been* declared righteous by God, your sins *have been* forgiven, and your account *has been* credited with the righteousness of Christ. You *have been* given an entirely new nature. You *have been* positionally sanctified. All of that is in the past tense. It has already occurred, as in a legal transaction. Yet it is much more than a mere transaction. It is a reality, for Christ now lives in you by His Spirit!

And such were some of you: but ye are (have been) washed, but ye are (have been) sanctified, but ye are (have been) justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God ([1 Cor. 6:11](#)).

Therefore, if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. [2 Cor. 5:17](#)

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ([Eph. 2:1](#)).

ye (have) put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ([Eph. 4:24](#)).

ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him ([Col. 3:9-10](#)).

Moreover, Scripture seems to indicate this past-tense aspect of salvation took place within the realm of your human spirit, which is distinct from the soul. [1] The spirit of man is reserved for God-consciousness, and prior to salvation is dead in trespasses and sins. It is made alive at regeneration.

A new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart (the old, dead spirit) out of your flesh ... And

I will put my spirit within you ([Ezek. 36:26-27](#)).

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ([John 3:6](#)).

If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness ([Rom. 8:10](#)).

Scripture is abundantly clear that salvation has a “past tense” component. You *have been* saved, and that work of God took place in your spirit.

I will be saved.

Moving from the past to the future, you *will be* saved when you meet Jesus face to face. This will happen when your body is reunited with soul and spirit at the rapture or some time shortly thereafter (perhaps at the Bema). The doctrinal term for this aspect of salvation is glorification – sometimes referred to as the redemption of the body – when the earthly body of corruption is given an incorruptible body, equipped for eternal existence.

Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body ([Rom. 8:2](#)).

Whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified ([Rom. 8:30](#)).

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality ... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory ([1 Cor. 15:53-54](#)).

After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession ([Eph. 1:13-14](#)).

Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption ([Eph. 4:30](#)).

We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is ([1 John 3:2](#)).

Technically speaking, the realm of the body is not yet saved. Is that not obvious? The body declines throughout its earthly existence until it eventually dies and decays in the ground. Paul called it “*this body of this death*” ([Rom. 7:24](#)). Nevertheless, every believer has the assurance that his body *will* be saved one day!!

I am being saved.

You *have been* saved. At some point in your past, God justified, regenerated, and sanctified you positionally. Specifically, it happened in your spirit, which the Holy Spirit made alive. In the future you *will be* saved, when Jesus reunites your soul and spirit with a glorified body. What about the present?

You *are being* saved. This aspect of salvation is known as sanctification, particularly the progressive or experiential aspect of sanctification, becoming more like Christ. Experiential sanctification happens in the realm of the soul, which is comprised of mind (intellect), emotions (feelings), and will (volition). You have all the provision necessary ([Gal. 2:20](#)) for progressing in the sanctification of your soul, because your spirit has already been positionally sanctified.

However, spiritual progression is not automatic. The believer must choose to appropriate the provision. Daily, moment by moment choices must be made to depend upon the enabling power of the Holy Spirit within one's spirit to lead the soul and then for the soul to lead the body, in that order. When a believer reverses the order, allowing the bodily desires or soulish passions to rule, carnality results, and the Spirit of God is grieved. Carnality may be temporary or could potentially continue indefinitely.

The salvation of one's soul is to be distinguished from the salvation of one's spirit. As has already been demonstrated, the salvation of the spirit is a thing of the past and impacts one's eternal destiny, whereas the salvation of the soul is a thing of the present and impacts one's eternal rewards (or loss thereof). Consider the words of Jesus:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life (lit. 'soul') shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life (soul) for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels ([Luke 9:24-26](#)).

This passage is not a warning for unbelievers. If it were, then Jesus would be preaching salvation by works. On the contrary, Jesus is speaking to His disciples. By extension that includes us. He challenges us to live for the eternal rather than for the here and now. If we choose to save (i.e., preserve) our soul now – in other words, live to please ourselves – we will lose our soul at the Judgment Seat. It will not be saved, in the sense of being sanctified. All will be lost, consumed, in God's testing furnace. *"The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" ([1 Cor. 3:13](#))*. It will be *"saved, yet so as by fire" ([1 Cor. 3:15](#))*. On the other hand, if we choose to lose our soul now – that is, die to self – then our soul will be saved, preserved at the Bema, and rewarded by Christ. Thus, a battle rages for the soul.

Incidentally, the battle is not between the new nature (a redeemed spirit) and a so-called old nature, as if they were level playing fields. The Bible

makes clear that *“old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)). The battle is between a redeemed spirit and an unredeemed soul that lives in an unredeemed body. The latter two are partners in crime.

This prompted Paul to cry out in [Romans 7:24](#), *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* The apostle’s unredeemed soul was working in league with his body, holding him back from serving God. He refers to it as *“the law of sin and death”* ([Rom. 8:2](#)). But in the same verse Paul reveals the secret of victory over this law. It is another law, *“the law of the spirit of life in Christ”* which frees believers from the law of sin and death. Some call it the law of counteraction.

Here’s the bottom line: the sinfulness of your unredeemed soul and body can be overcome by the righteous One Who lives within your spirit (that has been made righteous). Thus, your soul is being saved to the extent you are letting the law of the Spirit of life counteract the law of sin and death in your members. The extent of your reward (or loss) at the Judgment Seat will be determined by the extent to which your soul is saved in this life.

In a future article, we shall discuss at greater length the salvation of the soul.

[\[1\]](#) This article presupposes that man is a tripartite being, comprised of spirit and soul and body. [1 Thess. 5:23](#), *“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* [Heb. 4:12](#), *“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* While man cannot divide between soul and spirit, God can. In fact, [Heb. 4:12](#) seems to emphasize that God – through His Word – wants man to learn the distinction between soul and spirit.