

What are the tenses of salvation?

There is a sense in which salvation belongs to eternity; we were chosen by God in eternity past, and the fulness of our salvation will only begin in eternity future after the restoration of the earth. However, regarding our experience of salvation there are three clear aspects or three tenses: past, present and future.

Past Salvation: this is the salvation that was accomplished in us when we were converted. Paul tells us that 'you were washed ... you were sanctified ... you were justified' (1 Cor 6:11). These are aorist Greek tenses referring to a completed action in the past. We were not only justified (declared righteous) but sanctified (made holy). This regards the new spirit and heart that God gave us in regeneration (Ezek 11:19, 18:31). This work is complete. It enables us to fellowship with God in heaven, indeed we are seated with Christ in our spirit now (Eph 2:6). Our holy state is the result of definitive sanctification, whereby even the sinful Corinthians were called saints by Paul, 'those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus' (1 Cor 1:2). Through regeneration we are given a new nature, or new man, which is created in the likeness of Christ (Eph 4:24) and this is what makes us a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). This action does not make the body or the soul holy, which is why we still sin.

Present salvation: this regards the salvation that is being worked out in us now by the energy of God (Phil 2:12-13). This affects the human soul, which is what constitutes our human personality (mind, emotion, will). When we sin we choose to put on the old nature, which is dead (separated from God) and is never improved. When we consider, or reckon, this dead by faith (Rm 6:11) and deny it by choice (Lk 9:23) we can put on the new nature (Eph 4:22-24) and perform good works (Eph 2:10). The soul is neutral, it is just a vehicle for self expression. When the soul chooses sin, it puts on the old nature and becomes flesh. Thus the soul (self) is a battleground between the flesh and the Spirit (Rm 8:4ff.). The choosing of the new nature is part of saving the soul (1 Peter 1:8-9, 1:22, 4:19; Jm 1:21 – in these verses the 'saving of the soul' is by human actions, thus cannot be referring to conversion/regeneration which is not by human merit). Thus our souls are being progressively sanctified. This progressive sanctification results from choosing to put on the new man more and more faithfully over time and dying to the old man (mortification). The person becomes more like Christ in making right choices from a renewed mind (Rm 12:1-2). The mind is renewed when it trusts in God's word and denies sin.

Future salvation: this occurs after the Second Coming of Christ when our bodies are transformed to be like Christ's body. At this time those who have died are brought with Christ in the clouds and changed, while saints who are alive at his coming are transformed without seeing physical death (1 Cor 15:52; Phil 3:21; 1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Jn 3:2). It is only when we have a new spiritual body to match the resurrection life in our spirit that we can be eternally free from sin. Physical lusts no longer tempt the soul to sin.

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Understanding Ministries

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