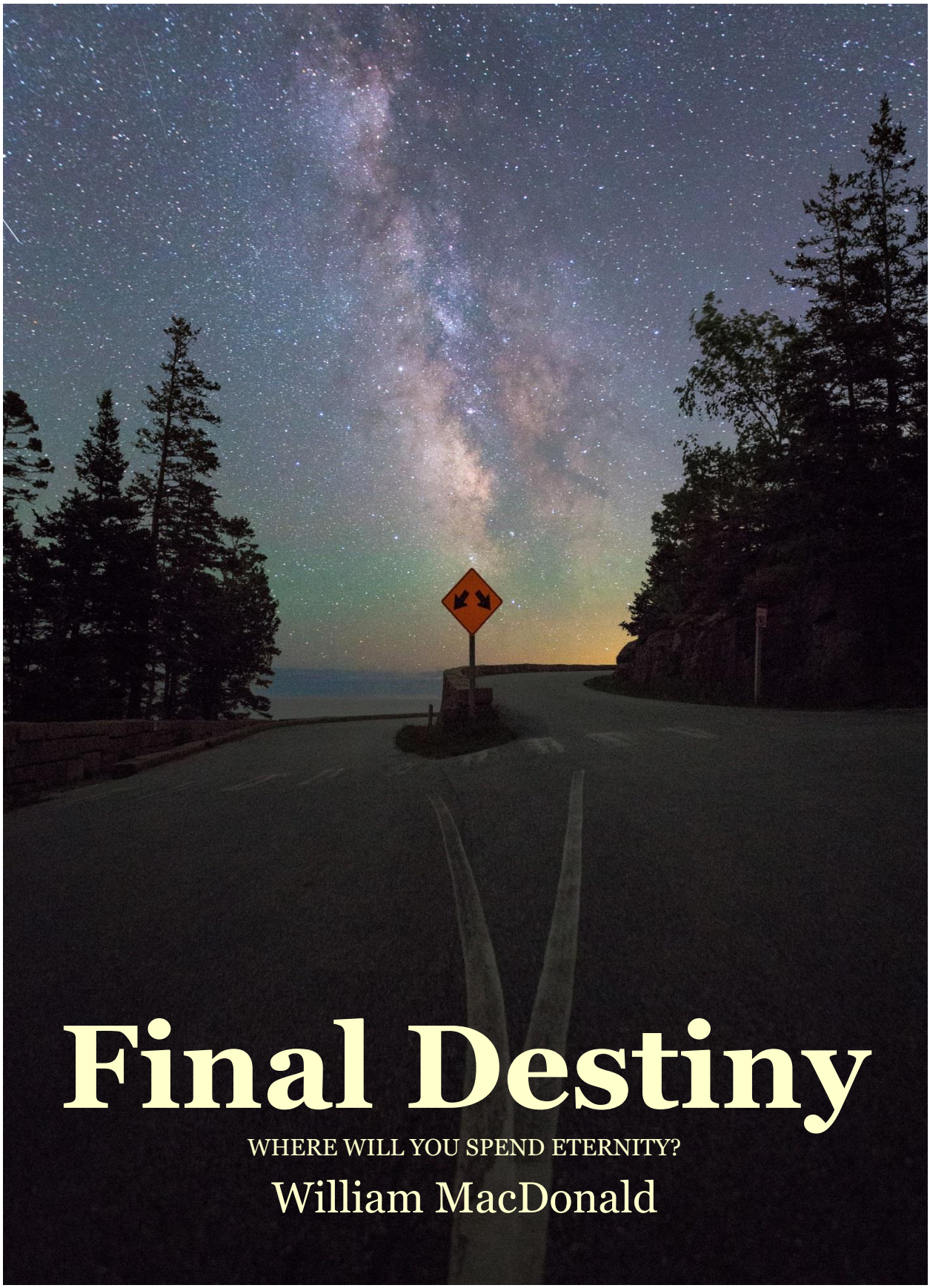


Final Destiny

WHERE WILL YOU SPEND ETERNITY?

William MacDonald

Final Destiny

By William MacDonald

Every thinking person must sooner or later wonder where he will go when he dies and where he will spend eternity. Take a few minutes to read this and you will find the answers.

What is your authority?

In seeking answers to life's most important questions, we must have some authority. The choice narrows down to two possibilities. It is either man's opinion or the Word of God. It's what people suppose or it's what God says.

In matters of vital and enduring significance, it must be an infallible authority. There must be no room for error. Human opinion certainly doesn't qualify here. Just as people's faces differ, so do their opinions.

Only the Bible, the Word of God, is.

It is truth (John 17:17).

2 Peter 1:20-21

"…knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

But how do we know?

- We know it by its fulfilled prophecies. There are over 60 prophecies concerning Christ alone that came true when He was on earth. In addition, there are hundreds of prophecies concerning Israel and the Gentile nations that have come to pass. The probability of all this happening by chance is too small to consider.

- At least 40 men in different countries, at different times, in three different languages, over a period of 1600 years penned the Sacred Word. They had no way of collaborating, yet the Bible has a unified theme. It tells one consistent story. What other book can boast of such intelligent design?

- The Scriptures are unique in their power to transform the lives of people from sin and shame to decency and integrity.

- The words of the Bible are applicable to all times; they are as current as the hourly news broadcast.

- They have universal appeal; they speak to people of every race, tongue, tribe, and nation.

- They are inexhaustible, providing material for endless study, comfort, and guidance.

- Think of all the literature God's Word has prompted – Bible dictionaries, commentaries, concordances, poetry, and sermons. It has inspired great movements such as the abolition of slavery, civil rights, social justice; institutions such as hospitals, schools, orphanages, homes for the poor and aged; and world agencies to alleviate poverty and hunger. It has exerted a positive influence on human society wherever it has traveled.

- It is pure, exposing sin and warning against it. It does not stoop to popular culture but seeks to elevate it.

- It is a living book. Some people actually fear it, while others would die for it.

- The Bible claims to be inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). That means that the words are God's words. If they are not, then it is a fraud. But even its enemies do not accuse it of being a hoax.

- The Holy Bible has endured centuries of efforts to burn and banish it. Yet it has survived. When governments forbid it, smugglers risk imprisonment and death to defy such edicts.

- No other book can compare with God's Word in the number of languages in which it speaks and the number of people who have read it.

- This amazing book records the life of a perfect Person. A mere man cannot write such an account. The French skeptic, Renan, said that it would take a Christ to invent a Christ.

In the literature of the ages, the Bible stands unparalleled and unique. Those who have experienced its transforming power in their lives are not likely to deny that it is the Word of the living God. Or, as someone has said, he who has felt the force of it is not likely to deny the source of it.

There is no risk in accepting the Bible as our final authority

What does the Bible say about man's destiny?

Now let us think about what the Bible says about death and the hereafter.

It says that death is certain. *It is appointed for men to die once* (Hebrews 9:27). Who can argue with that?

Every cemetery and funeral home bears silent testimony to that fact. Generations come and generations go. "Each one thinks that he will be eternal, and then that one becomes the missing face" (Will Houghton). Death is inescapable.

The Bible not only says that people must die. It adds in the verse just quoted *and after this comes judgment.* Note the words *after this*. Death is not the end. There is a hereafter. After death there is judgment and an eternity of endless suffering for those who are not ready to meet God. The Bible says *And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20:15).

Where will you spend eternity?

The Bible also tells us that there are only two places where a person can spend eternity – heaven or hell. The God who does not lie speaks of only these two destinies for the human race. A man or woman may choose not to believe this, but that does not alter the fact.

Since everyone must die, and since he will spend forever in heaven or hell, the most important thing in life is to know that he will have heaven as his address forever.

Is it possible to know, and if so, how?

Yes, it is possible to be positively sure. *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life* (1 John 5:13).

But first the bad news

Before we get to the how-to of eternal life, we have to talk about sin. What does that word mean and why is it important?

Sin is anything that falls short of the perfection of God (Romans 3:23). It means missing the mark.

It is not only doing wrong; it is failure to do what we know is right (James 4:17). This is known as sin of omission. Sin is lawlessness, the stubborn refusal to do God's will (1 John 3:4). When we have a bad conscience about doing something, yet go ahead and do it anyway, that is sin (Romans 14:23). Finally, *all unrighteousness is sin* (1 John 5:17).

The Bible is explicit and emphatic in declaring that everyone has sinned. It says that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). It also says that *there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins* (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Take The Test

Let's take a little test to see if you are an exception to the rule. Check the following lists to find out.

We begin with what mankind calls the grosser sins: fornication, adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, murder, and idolatry. Multitudes will plead not guilty to any of these (until they remember that Jesus said that the man who looks on a woman with lust has committed adultery (Matthew 5:28) and the one who hates another person is a murderer) (Matthew 5:22).

We move on to drunkenness, drug addiction, abortion, child abuse, cruelty, witchcraft, swearing, and addiction to pornography. Do you still protest your total innocence?

If so, then check the following: coveting, lust, envy, jealousy, hatred, pride, selfishness, gossiping, lying, cheating, disrespect of parents, promise breaking, and unfaithfulness. Can you now raise your right hand and testify under oath that you have never committed any of the above? If so, check one more point. How about an impure thought life?

The awful truth is that we are not just one-time sinners but sinners by practice. We sin every day in thought, word, and deed. If you deny this, you deceive yourself (1 John 1:8) and make God a liar (1 John 1:10).

We are totally depraved. We may not have committed every sin, but we are capable of doing it. And sin has affected every part of our being (Romans 3:13-18). What we are is a lot worse than anything we have ever done (Jeremiah 17:9).

No sinner can enter heaven (Revelation 21:27) unless his sins have been forgiven. If you have committed one sin, you are a sinner, and as a guilty sinner, you need to be saved.

A divine dilemma

But there is a problem. God is holy (Leviticus 19:2). He must always do what is right and proper. He cannot tolerate sin (Habakkuk 1:12-13) compromise with it, overlook it, or wink at it. His Word is clear that *the soul who sins will die* (Ezekiel 18:4). God's law demands the death of the sinner. The debt must be paid. Sin's penalty must be endured.

Yet if we endure the penalty for our sins, we will be doomed and damned eternally.

The divine dilemma is this. God loves the sinner (John 3:16). He does not want anyone to perish (Ezekiel 18:32; 2 Peter 3:9). He wants him or her to spend eternity with Him in heaven. He didn't make hell for mankind, but *for the devil and his angels* (Matthew 25:41). But He cannot allow a person to enter heaven while that person is still in his sins, that is, with sins still unforgiven. Nothing impure, wrong, or evil can ever enter there (Revelation 21:27). How then can God satisfy His love and still be righteous? How can He save sinners and still be holy?

There's hope for the hopeless

The situation is not hopeless. God has found a way by which He can forgive our sins without compromising His justice (Romans 3:26).

He sent His beloved Son to the earth 2000 years ago *to seek and to save that which was lost* (Luke 19:10). The Lord Jesus Christ went to the Cross of Calvary to die as our Substitute. That's a key word – Substitute. He died in our place (Galatians 2:20). He died the death that we should have died (1 Corinthians 15:3). He paid the debt that we owed because of our sins. He endured the penalty that we should have endured (1 Peter 2:24: 3:18).

We never understand the Good News until we realize that Someone has died for us, and *that* Someone is no less than our Creator-God (John 1:1,3). Instead of the sheep dying for the Shepherd, the Shepherd died for the sheep. Instead of the creature dying for the Creator, the Creator died for His creatures.

But how do we know that Christ's work as our Substitute was satisfactory to God the Father? We know it because He raised the Lord Jesus from the dead on the third day (Romans 4:25, 6:4; 1 Corinthians 15:4). This was positive proof that Christ finished the work necessary for our salvation and that God accepted it. If God hadn't raised Him, His death wouldn't have been different from any other person's. Jesus was the first One to rise from the dead in a glorified body that would never die again.

The Empty Tomb

This raises another question. If Christ died for all, then does it not follow logically that all are saved? No, it does not. The work of the Lord on the Cross is sufficient for the salvation of all, but it is only effective for those who accept Him as their Substitute. God is not in the business of taking people to heaven who don't want to be there. He cannot populate heaven with people who are still practicing sinners. What kind of a heaven would it be if it were inhabited by the world's worst perverts, murderers, and gangsters?

How not to be saved

Before we get to God's way by which a person can be sure of heaven, let's think of various false ways on which men and women are depending.

Most people think that salvation is by good works, by doing the best they can, by living a good life, or by good intentions. This is what most religions teach and most people in the world believe. The Bible says that this way seems right to people but it ends in death and doom (Proverbs 14:12). This is not the way to heaven. Salvation is not by meritorious works of any kind.

The Bible says that *all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment* (Isaiah 64:6). It doesn't say all our sins. It's all our good works that are like filthy rags. The Bible also says that *He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy* (Titus 3:5). It insists that salvation is *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast* (Ephesians 2:9).

I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance – Jesus

It's not by baptism, church membership, putting money in the collection, or religious rituals. If salvation were by works like these, then Christ's death would have been unnecessary. He would have wasted His life if there was some other way (Galatians 2:21). And if good works were the way of salvation, no one could ever know he was saved. He would never know if he had done enough good works or the right kind.

…A man is not justified by the works of the law – Galatians 2:16

Mark Twain said that if salvation was by being good, your dog would go in and you would stay out.

A surprising number of people believe that they will get to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments. Most of them cannot even recite the Ten Commandments, but they know that they are in the Bible and so that must be the way. What they don't know is that no one can keep these Commandments perfectly. God gave them in order to reveal sin (Romans 3:20), not to reveal salvation. They are God's standard to show us how far we fail.

Salvation is not by education, science, philosophy, psychology, materialism, reformation, or an improved environment.

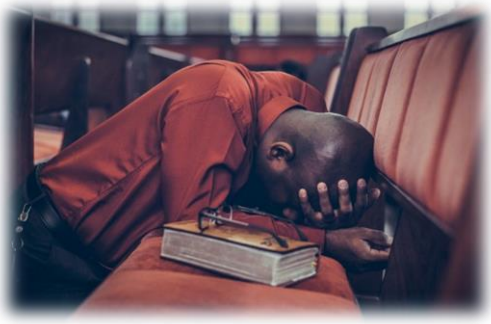
- Education teaches a sinner, but he only becomes an educated sinner.
- Science can explore outer space but it cannot change a person's inner life.
- Philosophy is man's wisdom. At the end of his life, American philosopher Bertrand Russell said, "Philosophy has proved a washout to me."
- Psychology cannot explain human behavior, let alone change it.
- Materialism may put food in the stomach but it can't save the soul.
- Reformation may put new clothes on a person but it doesn't put a new person in the clothes. That is why Jesus said, *You must be born again* (John 3:7).

Only one true way to heaven

God now offers salvation as a free gift to all who will repent of their sins and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Acts 20:21). Let's think about those two words, *repent* and *believe*. They are like two sides of the same coin. We *repent* when we acknowledge our need of salvation. We *believe* when we accept God's way.

What does it mean to repent? An old Puritan said that repentance is the vomit of the soul. It means that you are repulsed by your sin because it is disgraceful and disgusting. You do an about face – turning to God and away from your sin (Isaiah 55:7).

What does it mean to believe? You do this by accepting Jesus Christ as your only hope for heaven. You say from your heart, "Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner and unfit for heaven, but I believe You died for me on the Cross of Calvary, bearing the punishment that should have been mine. Now by a definite act of faith, I take You as my Lord and Savior, from now on to live for You."



To believe in Christ is to come to Him just as you are, in all your sin. An artist wanted to paint a picture of a prodigal son. One day he saw a beggar on the street and made an appointment for him to appear at the studio the next day. The beggar appeared, neatly dressed and clean shaved. The artist said, "I can't use you now. You should have come as the beggar that you really are."

To believe is to open the door to Him (Revelation 3:20).

It is to put your whole weight on Him as you do when you sit on a chair.

Faith is like taking a parachute jump. You trust your life to that circular piece of nylon. It is like diving into the swimming pool. You commit yourself to the water without reservation.

It is accepting a pardon. A pardon is only a piece of paper. To be effective, it must be accepted.

To believe in Christ is the most sane, sensible, rational thing that a person can do. What is more reasonable than believing in your Creator? There is nothing about Him that makes it impossible to believe in Him.

There is no risk in believing in Him. He is altogether trustworthy and His Word is the surest thing in the universe.

We must never forget the following great truths.

- Salvation is in a Person, and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:3). If you have Him, you are as saved as God can make you (1 John 5:12)
- Christ is the way to heaven (John 14:6)
- He is the only Way (Acts 4:12).
- No amount of sin is too great for God's salvation (Hebrews 7:25).

Actually it's your sin that makes you eligible for salvation. Christ didn't come *to call the righteous, but sinners* to repentance (Mark 2:17).

It's your unworthiness that makes you a prime candidate for eternal life. The only people who go to heaven are sinners who don't deserve it but whom God has forgiven.

The only people who go to heaven are sinners… whom God has forgiven

A key word of the gospel

This is a good place to stop and talk about grace, one of the key words of the Christian faith. Grace is the undeserved favor that God shows to those who deserve the very opposite. It is something you cannot earn or merit. It's a free gift. The minute you try to earn or merit it, it becomes a debt.

The apostle Paul makes this distinction when he writes: *Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness* (Romans 4:4-5).

You cannot earn salvation by doing good works. Salvation is freely given to you as a gift, by God's grace. You can't work to earn a gift!

In another place he again distinguishes between grace and works: *And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work* (Romans 11:6). It's not our merits that make us fit for heaven but the merits of Christ. That's why there are no degrees of fitness for heaven. There is no fitness beyond that which is found in Jesus.

When someone offers you a free gift you take it – you don't pay them for it.

Why some people don't trust Christ

It seems unreasonable. God wants to give salvation as a free gift to those who will accept His Son by faith, yet people refuse the invitation. Why? There are several reasons.

- In their colossal pride, they are ashamed of Jesus. Christ says to them, *For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels* (Mark 8:38).

- They are afraid of a violent reaction from their family. The Lord Jesus anticipated this when He said, *He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me* (Matthew 10:37). In other words, Christ must come first.

- They love their sins more than they love Christ. That is an irrational choice that will be regretted forever.

- They love *the praise of men more than the praise of God* (John 12:43).

- They are not as desperate as they should be. Eternal life is not their top priority.

- They are afraid that the cost is too high, that they would have to give up too much. They should consider the cost of not trusting Christ.

- They are afraid that they wouldn't be able to hold out. In their own strength, they would not be able. But when the Lord begins a work in a person's life, He holds that person in His mighty hands.

- They are too busy. When a Christian visited a businessman, the latter asked what he wanted.

  "Just to speak to you about your soul
  and where you will spend eternity."
  "But can't you see that I'm busy?"
  The Christian put out his hand to say goodbye
  and then said, "Suppose I had been death!"

If you were to die today and God asked you, "Why should I let you into Heaven?" What would you say?

Excuses, excuses, excuses

Well-worn excuses abound whenever the claims of Christ are presented to people. Here are a few of them and the answers to them.

- "There are so many hypocrites in the church." The Lord doesn't ask you to believe in other people but in Him.

- "All the church wants is your money." Christ doesn't want your money; He wants your trust.

- "What about people who have never heard the Gospel?" The Judge of all the earth will do right (Genesis 18:25). The question now is not about the heathen. It's about you who have heard the Gospel. What are you going to do with it?

- "Why does God allow so much evil in the world?" Through the atoning work of Christ, more glory has come to God and more blessing to man than if sin had never entered.

- "If Christians are right, why are there so few of them?" At the time of the flood, only the eight people who entered the ark were saved. All the rest perished in the water. It is not true that the majority is always right.

- "How can a God of love send people to hell?" People choose to go to hell by willfully refusing the offer of salvation.

- "Isn't it narrow-minded to think there is only one way?" As mentioned already, if there was more than one way, then the Lord Jesus didn't need to die. Why would He pay the greatest price if a lesser price would do?

- "It seems too easy." It has to be easy if salvation is going to be available to all. Everyone can believe on Him, whereas not everyone could meet any other condition.

These are excuses. The problem is not in the mind; it's in the will. Jesus made this clear when He said, *But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life* (John 5:40). On another occasion He said to Jerusalem, *How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing* (Luke 13:34)!

The moment to decide

Christ invites you to repent, believe on Him, be born again, and find rest (Matthew 11:28)

Make no mistake about it, you are either for Christ or against Him (Matthew 12:30). If you are against Him, you take your place with Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, Osama bin Laden and all the rapists, perverts, and murderers of the world. Hardly a desirable circle of companions for eternity, is it?

Why you should trust Christ and be saved

Four compelling facts call for a positive response to the call of Christ:

- Your present happiness depends on it.
- Your forever welfare depends on it.
- You have everything to gain and nothing to lose.
- There is no risk.

Why you should do it now

The present moment is the only time of which you can be sure. God says that *now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Life is uncertain. Every day people rise and go to work, little realizing that before evening they will have met God. Today some will leave Planet Earth due to a heart attack, an accident, or criminal assault. The possibilities of sudden death are legion.

The coming of the Lord is near. Jesus may come at any moment. Those who are saved will meet Him in the air and return with Him to the Father's house in heaven (John 14:1-3). Those who are not saved will remain for a fearful time of judgment on the earth (Matthew 24:21) and a lost eternity (Revelation 20:14-15).

You've already kept Him standing outside the door for years. You don't treat others that way. Why do you treat your God like that? Let Him in.

God has made an unchangeable decree that every knee will bow to Jesus and every tongue will confess Him as Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). It is better to do it now voluntarily and be saved than to do it by compulsion later on and be lost eternally.

It is later than it has ever been before. A little boy counted off the chimes on the grandfather's clock when it struck on the hour in his grandmother's house. One day it was out of order and it chimed 13, 14, 15 times. The boy ran in to the kitchen and said, "Grandma, Grandma, it's later than it's ever been before." The day of opportunity is almost over.

Someday you will stand before God and the question will be "What did you do with my Son?" Your final destiny will depend on the answer.

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36).

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved

How can I know?

When you repent of your sins and trust the Lord Jesus as your Savior from sin it is important that you be well grounded in the assurance of salvation. How can you have utmost confidence that you are now saved?

The first way is through the Word of God. The Bible says *that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9). As soon as you have believed in Jesus as your undoubted Lord and Savior, God says that you are saved. He cannot lie, deceive, or be deceived. If He says it, it is true.

Other evidences of salvation appear in the days that follow.

- You will have a new hatred of sin (Romans 7:24) and a new love of holiness (Romans 7:22)
- Although you will still commit acts of sin, you will not practice it (1 John 3:9).
- Sin will not have dominion over you (Romans 6:14)
- You will love the children of God (1 John 3:14)
- You will continue in the faith (1 John 2:19)

Some people have a dramatic conversion. They are filled with joy as they are released from the burden of their sins. With others it may be simply the quiet acceptance of God's gift without any outward signs or fanfare. In either case, a person should not base his assurance of salvation on feelings. They are too changeable and undependable. If Christ alone is your hope of heaven, you are saved whether you feel it or not. Facts are better than feelings.

What's next?

Baptism. Now that you are saved, you will want to obey the Lord in baptism. While it is not necessary for salvation, it is necessary for obedience (Matthew 28:19). In baptism, you publicly pledge your allegiance to Christ as your Lord and Savior. You identify yourself with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). Because He died as your Representative, you died with Him. Baptism is also a commitment to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). This means to live the baptized life as one who has died to sin.

There are other important steps in the Christian life

Confession. You should learn to confess your sins directly to God as soon as you are conscious of them. When you do, you receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9). You received forgiveness from God the Judge for the penalty of sin when you trusted Christ. Now you receive parental forgiveness from God your Father.

He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins…

Consecration. Begin each day by presenting your body a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2). This means that you exchange your will for His.

The Bible. To grow in the Christian life you must read, study, memorize, and meditate on the Bible. This is how you hear God speaking to you.

Prayer. In prayer you speak to your heavenly Father. It is good to pray at regular times and also whenever some special occasion arises.

Local church. As soon as possible you should associate with a Bible-believing church, one that accepts the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God. A New Testament church is one that is composed of saints, elders, and deacons (Philippians 1:1) and that meets for the apostles' doctrine (Bible teaching), fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). Ask the Lord to lead you to the church of His choice, not yours.

Witness. Ask Him for opportunities to witness for Him. This means sharing the Gospel with unsaved relatives, neighbors, friends, and other acquaintances.

A final word

If you have read this far and are still unsaved, we make a final loving appeal to you. Come to Christ just as you are, believe that He died for you on the Cross, and accept Him as your Lord and Savior and your only right to enter heaven. Then claim His promise…

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:9-10).

Final Destiny by William MacDonald

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