

Our Position and Practice

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus . . . (NASB) Eph. 2:4-6

It was the day after Christmas at a church in San Francisco. The pastor of the church was looking over the nativity scene and noticed that the baby Jesus was missing. Earlier a little boy had been standing nearby. So the pastor hurried outside and found him with a red wagon, and in the wagon was the figure of the infant Jesus. Then the pastor walked over to the boy and said, “Well, where did you get your passenger?” The little boy replied, “I got him from the church.” “And why did you take him?” The boy said, “Well, before Christmas I prayed to the little Lord Jesus; I told him that if he would bring me a red wagon for Christmas I would give him a ride around the block in it.”

THE GIFT WE EXPECT. The little boy received a wonderful Christmas gift and kept his promise. A man or woman who has his/her sins forgiven by God receives a tremendous gift, too! One such young man was Sam. Sam was a high school student when he started attending a Bible study called Theta Chi. The Bible study was a ministry to young people. It included worship, the teaching of God’s Word, and a social time. Sam started attending when the group was studying the book of Revelation. He showed an interest in spiritual things by asking many questions about God and the Bible. Finally, one day he asked how he could have his sins forgiven and go to heaven. It was a great day for Sam and the young people in the study. There was rejoicing and excitement that Sam became a saint just like the rest of them.

1. If you had been in the Theta Chi study and Sam had approached you about having his sins forgiven, what would you have told him that he needed to do? If Sam had been told the wrong thing, that would have been a tragic mistake. What is necessary to have one’s sins forgiven? Read Mark 1:15; Luke 8:12; John 1:12; and Acts 16:31.

2. What is one mark of a real Christian, according to Romans 10:9?

WHAT IS BAPTISM? Some time later Sam was baptized along with some other young people. Baptism is an important event to Christians. It is an act of obedience that should occur after a person starts believing and depending on Jesus for the forgiveness of his/her sins. Some Christians are baptized by immersion into water. Others are sprinkled with water. However it is practiced, baptism does not forgive sins. It is only an outward evidence of an inward change. Baptism was a key part of

Passage	What Is Required To Become A Christian?			
	Believe	Repent	Confess	Baptize
Mark 1:15	✓			
Luke 8:12	✓			
John 1:12	✓			
3:16	✓			
3:36	✓			
5:24	✓			
6:40	✓			
11:25	✓			
20:31	✓			
Acts 2:38	-	✓	These are present as the results of true belief.	✓
16:31	✓			
19:4	✓	✓		✓
Rom. 3:22	✓			
4:3	✓			
10:9	✓		✓	
Gal. 3:3-9	✓			
3:22	✓			
Eph. 2:8-9	✓			
1 Tim. 1:16	✓			
James 2:23	✓			
1 John 2:23	✓			

John the Baptist's ministry. Mark 1:4 tells us that John's baptism was about repentance (admission and regret over one's sin). Those who wanted to be baptized were indicating that they desired to live a holy life. They longed to have their sins forgiven by God. The Apostle Paul tells us that John's baptism was about repentance. It did not forgive sins. It was a call or a public declaration that one believed in the Messiah - Jesus Christ.

Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." (NASB) Acts 19:4

- Some teach that baptism is necessary in order to have one's sins forgiven. If this is true, then God should repeatedly remind us that this is necessary. If we look at passages such as Mark 1:15; John 3:16; John 20:30-31; Rom. 3:22 and 1 Tim. 1:16, what is missing? How do these and other verses like these indicate that baptism is not necessary for the forgiveness of our sins?

The forgiveness of our sins is called salvation because God rescues us from eternal punishment. Salvation is not about actions or deeds such as baptism, repentance, or confession of sins, but about *believing* in a person - Jesus Christ. In response we

repent over our sins and are baptized as a sign to others that we have believed in Jesus. Salvation is about trusting. It is about depending on a person - Jesus. It is also about submission to Him.

GOD'S ACT OF LOVE. Sam did not feel sorrow over his sins or long to be at peace with God, or choose to believe in Jesus Christ on His own. They were miracles. God was working in his heart and mind to make it happen. God the Holy Spirit worked in Sam and motivated him to seek God.

4. Why did the Holy Spirit need to motivate Sam to desire to be forgiven, according to Romans 3:10-12?

5. What did the Holy Spirit do to Sam according to John 16:8-10?

6. What does Acts 10:43 say happens to a person who believes in Jesus Christ?

God's Love For You . . .

God tells us in John 1:12-13 that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ will become a child of God. We will be heirs to all that belongs to Him. We will be part of His family with all of the privileges of a family member. Can you think of anything better than that? That is awesome news.

But there is a greater proof of His love when we realize that God selected us to be forgiven and to be His children at the beginning of time. God decided who would become a Christian before He created us. He chose us! But scripture also teaches that we choose God. Scripture teaches that God decided and that we also decided. We both decide. How can both be true? Only God has that answer. 1 Timothy 2:3-4 says that God wants everyone to believe in Him.

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (NASB) 1 Timothy 2:3-4

But then how do we handle John 6:37?

All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out . . . No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day . . . And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father." (NASB) John 6:37, 44, 65

These two appear to be in conflict. Only God knows how both can be true. We do not understand some things in scripture either, such as God's being a Trinity, the virgin birth, God's becoming a man, Jesus living His life as the God-man, how both the Holy Spirit and a human write scripture, or how to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you," for examples. Yet, we believe these truths. The truth is simple. God selected us and we select Him.

Yet, the best news is this. God has shown His love to every saint by selecting us.

7. In the study “The Rescue,” we discovered that Jesus came to this earth for the purpose of dying in order to forgive our sins. God planned all of this. Why did God do all of this according to John 3:16?

POSITION AND PRACTICE. At the moment Sam believed in Jesus, he became a new Christian. Sam knew very little about God. He did not know the Bible. He was eager to learn while he was still struggling with sin in his life. The New Testament tells us that every new Christian enters into a new life and yet there are old parts of him/her that have not changed. We still sin and are incomplete. Yet, in Jesus Christ we are perfect. That is, we are declared to be “positionally” perfect and complete. That is, God considers us to be perfect and complete, even though He knows that we still sin. For example, God declares us to be saints (1 Cor. 1:2) or holy ones and yet, we still sin and need forgiveness (1 John 1:9). So He calls us to live up to our holy position. Positionally we are holy, but by our behavior, experience, or practice we are not holy. Positionally we are holy, but by our practice we are sinners.

8. The position that God has given to you is listed below followed by your everyday experience. Your position in Jesus is listed first. However, we do act according to our position. Therefore, what do I need to do?

Position in Jesus

What Do I Need to Do?

Spiritually Alive	- Eph. 2:4-5	Rom. 8:12-14	<u>I need to act as if the flesh is dead</u>
Dead to Sin	- Rom. 6:11	Rom. 6:12-13	<u>I need to stop sinning.</u>
Forgiven	- 1 John 2:12	1 John 1:9	_____
New Life	- 2 Cor. 5:17	Rom. 6:4	_____
Seated in heaven	- Eph. 1:3	Col. 3:1-2	_____
Light to the world	- Matt. 5:14	Eph. 5:8	_____
Holy and blameless	- Eph. 1:4	1 Pet. 1:15-16	_____
Freedom	- John 8:32	Gal. 6:1	_____
Secure in Christ	- 1 Pet 1:5	2 Pet. 1:10	_____
We Have Unity	- Eph. 4:4-6	Eph. 4:3	_____
Saints are in grace	- Rom. 5:2	2 Pet. 3:18	_____
Live in the Spirit	- Gal. 5:25	Gal. 5:25	_____
Empowered to serve	- Eph. 3:20	Eph. 3:16	_____
Saints are in love	- Rom. 5:5	1 Pet. 1:22	_____

THE UNEXPECTED GIFT. When anyone believes in Jesus, he/she has been given an amazing gift. It is an unexpected gift. The gift is simply this: we are already in heaven with Jesus,

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus . . . (NASB) Eph. 2:4-6

Wow, this is a great positional truth. While we are still living here on earth, God has positionally or symbolically placed every saint in heaven. God considers each saint - each person who believes in Jesus - to be worthy of heaven. You are already there! He has already placed each saint in heaven. Death is the door to home. Now that is spiritual security! We are saved only once. Glory be to God!

PATH TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH. Our practice does not match our position. Therefore, God wants to change us so that we match the position He has given us. Just like any family, we cannot grow in maturity by ourselves. Children need parents to guide, teach, encourage, and nurture them. It is not possible to mature well by ourselves. So God has given His children, His holy ones, those whom He has seated in the heavenly places, three key areas that should be part of their growth.

9. Christians are a family - a spiritual family. We are the children of God. One of the most important aspects of any family is mutual support. Hebrews 10:24-25 explains how we are to support one another. How does God want us to support the saints? Why is it necessary to meet together? What is the advantage?

10. 1 Corinthians 12:14-25 and Hebrews 6:10 tell us what the saints should be doing with one another. What did you discover in these verses?

11. Hebrews 5:11-14 tells us that some Christians are drinking milk and others are eating solid food. Are you on a diet of milk or solid food? Are you a spiritual baby or a maturing Christian? How do you know?

12. What are the marks of a maturing Christian according to Heb. 5:11-14 and 1 John 2:12-14?

13. There is one area that some saints miss. It is encouragement that is found in Heb. 12:1 and Heb. 13:7. Hebrews 13:7 is the key passage. It encourages us to be mentored or disciplined by someone. What are the criteria for the mentor that a saint should select?

14. What should be the goal of every saint? The answer is found in 1 John 2:12-14.

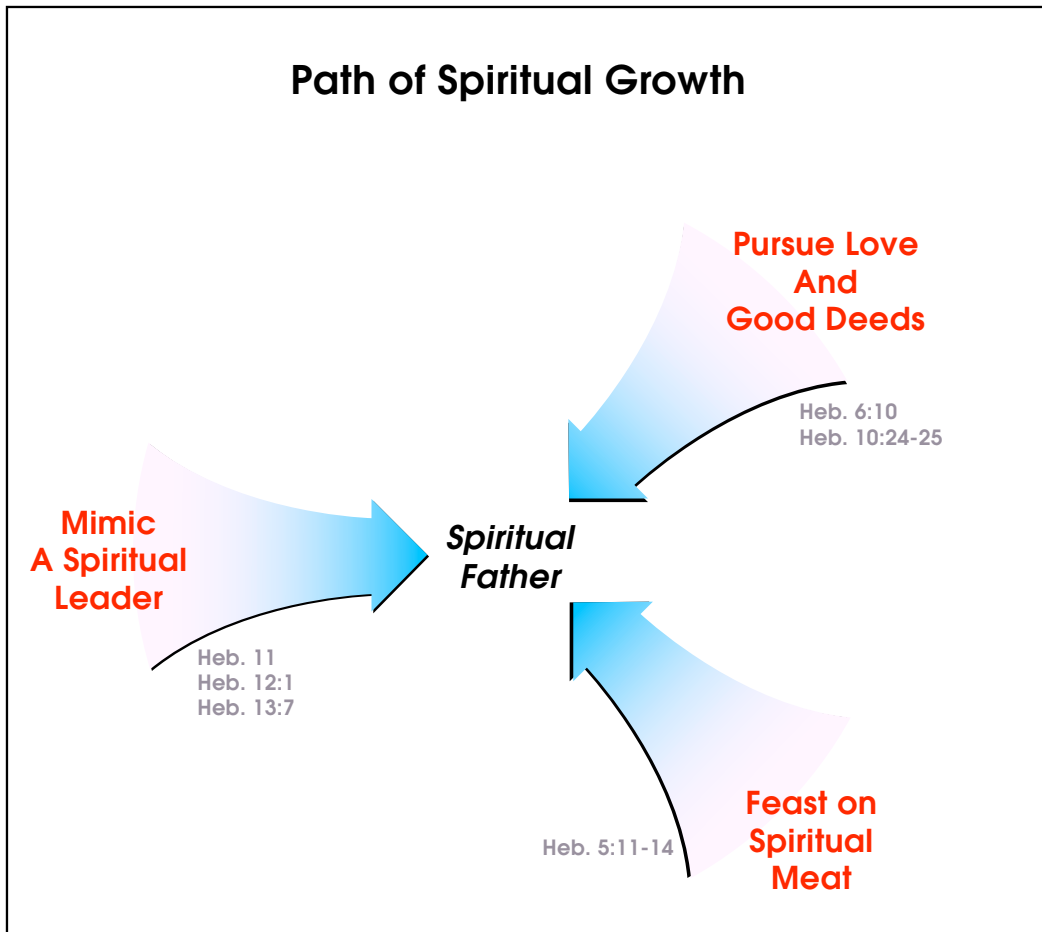
Spiritual Mysteries!

Does God and the teachings of the Bible seem boring? Have you ever wondered if there was anything new to learn? If so, then think about these mysteries:

- God wrote scripture using human authors.
- Jesus was born without a human father.
- God has life in Himself. He is self-existing.
- We have one God who is the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- The world was created with nothing.
- Jesus was both a man and God.
- Adam sinned and so we are sinners.
- The Holy Spirit lives inside of us.
- God is changing us spiritually in spite of ourselves.
- Some day we will have heavenly bodies.
- God chose us to be forgiven and yet we choose Him.
- Jesus raised people from the dead.
- Jesus loves us . . .

Only God understands these mysteries. Praise His name!

Path of Spiritual Growth



THINGS TO PONDER

1. What is the goal in the Christian life according to Jer. 9:12-13 and 1 John 2:12-14?

2. What “position and practice” in Jesus had the greatest meaning for you?

3. Which of these marks are evident in your life? Are you sure that you are a saint?

Fruit of the Spirit	Gal. 5:22-24	_____
Understand spiritual things	1 Cor. 2:14	_____
Confessing your sins	1 John 1:9	_____
You obey Jesus	Luke 6:46	_____
Love for others	1 John 4:8, 18-20	_____
Grow spiritually	1 John 2:12-14	_____
Desire to read His Word	1 Pet. 2:2	_____

4. What does it feel like to know that you are forgiven and already seated in heaven?

5. What area of spiritual growth is missing in your life?

Seated In Heaven!

Answer true (T) or false (F) to each of the following statements:

1. Before people become saints, they are walking dead people. _____
2. A person needs to be baptized in order to have his/her sins forgiven. _____
3. People need to have a sense that they are sinners and have a desire to be forgiven before God will forgive them and allow them into heaven. _____
4. The overwhelming message in the New Testament is that we need to believe in Jesus in order to have our sins forgiven. It is repeated again and again. _____
5. Every saint needs to be mentored by someone spiritually more mature. _____
6. God tells us how to recognize who is qualified to be a spiritual mentor. _____
7. One great spiritual mystery is that God considers me to be holy, yet I need to act holy. _____
8. Every saint should be able to teach the Bible to someone else. _____
9. Every saint is completely and totally forgiven. _____
10. Every saint is already seated in the heaven. _____