

God's Plan for Your Life

Booklet One

First Things First

by
John McReynolds

Aletheia Bible Ministries
Baytown, Texas

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Foreword

This is the first booklet in a series titled *God's Plan for Your Life*. This series is primarily aimed at two groups of people: new Christians, but also Christians who have been in the faith for a while, and who want to go back and re-view some of the fundamentals of the faith. It is designed to present some of the basic Bible doctrines that every new believer needs to begin a life of spiritual success and victory.

However, this study isn't for everybody. There is one prerequisite to studying the information contained in this series, and that is you must be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm not trying to be exclusivist or elitist or anything like that—there is a very practical reason for this. If you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ you will get very little out of these studies—in fact the Bible doctrines we will be presenting will probably make very little sense to you.

Now it may be that you are reading this but you are not sure whether you are truly a Christian or not—you may not know for sure whether you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. If this is your situation, let me urge you to read on, and pay very close attention to what follows in this first booklet. We are going to present some information that can not just change your life, but how you respond to it may determine your eternal destiny. We are about to give you the information you need to be certain of your eternal standing with God. Then, after that question has been settled, you should proceed with the other booklets in this series. On the other hand if you know beyond a doubt that you are born again you can skip to the next booklet in this series, *Getting Started in the Christian Life*.

God's Plan for Your Life

FIRST THINGS FIRST

What if I'm Not Sure I'm Saved?

So let me ask you a question: If you were to die today, do you know where you would go?

Now if you are not certain about the answer to that question I can tell you that you have plenty of company—neither are many millions of other folks. There are a lot of different opinions concerning this issue of the afterlife, or even the whole question of God—whether He exists, and if He does what is His attitude toward us? Maybe you haven't worried much about it, or maybe you have always believed that there is no hereafter—that after you die there's nothing as far as you're concerned. Or maybe you do believe in a hereafter, but there's not any heaven or hell, just another plane of existence, or maybe you get reincarnated and you get another chance at life.

Perhaps you do believe in heaven and hell, but you figure if you do more good things than bad things St. Peter will open the Pearly Gates for you. Or maybe you've done some horrible things and you feel that you're doomed—that there's no way that God would ever forgive you.

Maybe you just don't believe in God, or maybe you do, but you think that He doesn't really care one way or the other what you do—that you have no accountability to God. Perhaps you think God doesn't really care about sin. Well friend, there are multiplied millions all over the world that hold these same and many other views about God and heaven and hell.

But there is a document that has been around a long time and it has much to say about all these beliefs. We know it as the Bible. And many millions of people for nearly 2000 years have staked their lives on the belief that the Bible is the very Word of God. I don't want to get into a discussion about the Bible as the inspired Word of God—this isn't the place for that. But I would like you, just for the time it takes you to read these words, to assume that what the Bible says is true—just for these few minutes. If you'll do that for me I'd like to look at some of those beliefs we just mentioned and show you what the Bible says about them. Let's take them one at a time:

What about the afterlife, heaven and hell?

Do you believe that there is no hereafter—that after you die there's nothing? Look at what the Bible says:

“Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

Hebrews 9:2

The Bible says that not only is there an afterlife, but that there will be a judgment.

Are you not sure whether there is any heaven or hell? Here's what the prophet Isaiah had to say:

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool ...’”

Isaiah 66:1

Not only is there a heaven, but it is God's own throne! And in the Gospel of Matthew it says this:

“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven ...”

Matthew 5:12

When He was walking among men Jesus Christ said this about His home in heaven:

“In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”

John 14:2

Not only is there a heaven, but people will be getting rewarded there and will be living there.

Now what about hell? In His famous parable about the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus relates:

“The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side ...”

Luke 16:22–23

The Bible often refers to hell as the Lake of Fire:

“If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 20:15

And in the Book of Psalms the fate of the wicked is presented:

“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”

Psalms 9:17

There is no doubt that the Bible presents the reality of hell in very certain terms.

Won't I get another chance?

Perhaps you think that reincarnation will give you another shot at life? Let's have another look at Hebrews 9:27—we quoted it earlier:

“Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

Hebrews 9:27

The Bible emphatically denies the existence of reincarnation.

But I do lots of good things—doesn't that count?

Do you think that if you do more good things than bad things you'll get into heaven? Here's what the Apostle Paul had to say about that:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Ephesians 2:8–9

The Bible makes it plain that no one can be saved by anything they can do—the Bible calls that “works”—so doing more good than bad won’t get you into heaven.

Maybe you don’t think you’re really a sinner? The Bible squashes that idea quite firmly:

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

1 John 1:8

“As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...’”

Romans 3:10, 23

There’s no way God could ever forgive me.

Maybe you have the opposite problem. Maybe you think that not only are you a sinner, but you have committed sins so awful that you can’t get forgiveness from God. Not so! The Bible declares in many places that salvation is available to everyone. Jesus Himself declares:

“Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”

John 6:37

The Apostle Peter asserts:

“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Acts 2:21

The Bible declares that salvation is available to all men—it doesn’t exclude anyone. All men—including all the best—were born condemned because we are all descended from the original sinner—Adam. But because of Jesus’ sacrifice all men—including all the worst—can be saved:

“... just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”

Romans 5:1

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.”

Titus 2:11

And just in case you were wondering, that phrase “all men” means all women too!

There is no sin you have committed that cannot be forgiven when you accept Jesus Christ as Savior: The Apostle Paul said:

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”

I Timothy 1:15

Paul wasn't exaggerating here—before his conversion he really was one of the worst sinners who ever lived! The prophet Isaiah also commented on the extent of Christ's atonement for sin, saying in effect that the worst sins were cleansable by the blood of Christ:

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.’”

Isaiah 1:18

I don't believe in God—I'm an atheist!

Do you think that God doesn't really exist? If so I'm afraid the Bible isn't very flattering toward you: In the Psalms it says:

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

Psalms 14:1

God describes the atheist as a fool. But even an atheist can be saved, if he changes his mind about God.

There's no way a loving God will send me to hell.

Do you think that God won't really hold all men accountable to Him for their sins? Don't kid yourself friend—you will be held accountable:

“For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”

Ecclesiastes 12:14,

The Book of Revelation describes the Last Judgment:

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

“The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 20:11–15

Why should God care whether or not I sin?

Do you think that God doesn't really care about sin? Think again! Look at what the apostle Paul said:

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 6:23

God says the ultimate consequence of sin—any sin—is death! But He also says that He has a gift for man, and that’s “... *eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

In Romans 3:23 Paul tells us that “... *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...*” And that means you too, friend. The Bible describes all men as coming under judgment, and that includes you. And as we have just seen the Bible describes all those whose names weren’t found in the Book of Life as being cast into the Lake of Fire. Oh yes, the Lord cares about sin—and He is infinitely offended by it and because of His very nature He must judge it—and the penalty is eternal death.

And don’t suppose that eternal death means cessation of existence. Everyone will exist forever somewhere. If your eternal existence is eternal life you will live forever in the most wonderful, blessed circumstances possible, eternally happy and joyous. But if your eternal existence is eternal death, well that my friend will be the exact opposite of eternal life—eternal sorrow, eternal regret, and conscious, unending misery for all of eternity ... this is not a fate I would wish on anyone.

So let me ask you again very pointedly and directly:
If you were to die today, do you know where you would go?

You might not be any closer to an answer than you were before, but I hope now you’re a little more concerned about it than you were a few minutes ago! I

hope by now you have a sense of the terrible predicament that you're in if you have not accepted God's gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. So what is this gift of eternal life? Let's talk about that a minute.

God the Father, who knows everything—past, present and future—knew who you were back before man was created. Jesus Christ, the Creator, knew you too, and had you personally in mind when He went to die on the cross. They knew every sin you would ever commit. And so when Jesus Christ hung on the cross the Father poured out on Him every sin that would ever be committed by every human who would ever be born—past, present and future—including yours and mine. God then judged those sins and condemned them, and He assessed the penalty for those sins—death! And so Jesus Christ died for the sins of mankind, yours, mine—everyone's who ever lived and who will ever live. And because Jesus died for your sins and mine, He made it possible for us to have eternal life with God, instead of the second death, or the Lake of Fire we read about a minute ago.

So how do we go about getting this eternal life that Rom 6:23 talks about? Well this is the Good News, my friend. Because all we have to do to live with God forever—to have eternal life—is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That's it! We must express faith alone in Christ alone. Jesus Christ is the only way to God! Look at Acts 4:12:

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Jesus says in John 14:6:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

There’s nothing we can add to faith in Christ, either. Adding anything we can do is works:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Eph 2:8, 9

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

What’s the alternative to accepting Jesus as our Savior?

“Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

John 3:18,

Friend, if you have never believed in Christ—if you are an unbeliever—then in that condition you are without any hope for eternal blessings. Instead, eternal

condemnation—eternal death—is your future, unless you make the one good decision that is open to you. God has placed before you today the opportunity to gain eternal life—an eternity of inconceivable blessings in the very presence of God.

We've already read about the alternative to this—eternal separation from Him. As an unbeliever your eternal future is one of endless regret, misery and conscious agony in the Lake of Fire prepared for the devil and his angels. You can change this horrible future by one conscious decision. God has made a way of escape for you, but you must choose to do it God's way. Existing in hell forever doesn't have to be your fate. Here's the greatest opportunity of your life, right in front of you. You can be saved, right here, right now, as you read these words. How? In the book of Acts it says:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved ...”

Acts 16:31

In the privacy of your own mind, in your own thoughts, tell God the Father that you believe in Jesus Christ and that you accept Him as your Savior. The very second you do that is the second that you receive eternal life, and are assured of an eternity with the Lord. It doesn't have to be a fancy prayer—in fact it's better if it's not, because no one is saved because of flowery phrases. Something as simple as this will do:

“Father I believe the Lord Jesus Christ died for my sins, and I accept Him as my Savior.”

That's it! Faith alone in Christ alone. Are you worried that maybe you don't have enough faith? Don't worry! God knows your heart—and if you truly want to be saved He'll give you the faith to believe. All you have to do is express that faith to him in the simplest and briefest of prayers!

Friend, if you just prayed that prayer in faith, then you are now an adopted child of God. According to the Apostle Peter you have just entered ...

“... into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed ...”

1st Peter 1:4, 5

Now, if you've accepted Christ as Savior, then you're ready for the next part of God's plan—which is what we'll cover in the rest of this series of booklets. As a brand new born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you need to immediately begin a diet of spiritual food. What do I mean by that? I mean you need to begin hearing, and reading, and feeding on the Word of God just as a brand new baby needs to feed on his mother's milk! That's one of the meanings of the phrase “born-again”—you have just been born into the spiritual realm, and you need spiritual food. In these booklets we have a lot of information that will help you to get started.

But this information is not enough by itself. You also need to seek a local church that teaches the Bible.

It is very important for your spiritual growth that you have the frequent company of other born-again believers. God designed the local church to meet the needs of believers—brand new ones, as well as those who have been in the faith for many years. Ask God and He will lead you to one.

In the meantime, congratulations on making the wisest choice you'll ever make, and welcome, my brother or sister in Christ, to the Family of God.

