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# FOLKS Like Us

AN ANCIENT-MODERN PROBLEM  
“Even The Demons Believe...How Am I Different?”

Timeless truths from our ancient past,  
for a journey with God in the modern era.

**Fran Sciacca**

## “Folks Like Us” — an introduction

Over the years I’ve written and published a number of Bible studies that collectively have sold well over a half-million copies. They were forged, most of them, in the furnaces of pain, doubt, and loneliness. Maybe that’s why they were well-used, they touched people where they hurt most.

Recently, my publisher decided that they no longer wanted to handle the books that contained these 60 or so individual studies. So, I’ve decided to make them available to any who might benefit from them. At no cost.

I have always believed that because God thought it best to become human in the Incarnation, that perhaps “incarnational truth” was His preferred method of revealing Himself and His purposes to us. I suppose that’s where the basic genre of these studies originated. I wanted to provide believers with Bible studies rooted in our ancestral past. The lives of men and women, who it turns out, are “folks just like us” in so many ways.

So, please take your time and work slowly through as many of these studies as you care to do... there’s a lot of them! And may God use the combination of the struggles and insights of your *ancient* brothers and sisters, combined with those of mine, your modern brother, to help you in your spiritual journey. That is the goal of this project.

Warmly in The Lamb,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fran Sciacca". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fran Sciacca  
Birmingham, AL

# AN ANCIENT-MODERN PROBLEM

“*Even The Demons Believe...How Am I Different?*”

**A**BIDING PRINCIPLE – Salvation is more than forgiveness of sin and assurance of eternal life. God wills that those He has saved spend their life cooperating with His work, and He wants to conform them to the image of His Son.

“*Faith makes the Christian, but love proves him. Faith believes God to be true; love proves faith to be true.*”  
—Charles Haddon Spurgeon

**T**he epistle of James was perhaps the first New Testament book written. Most likely it was penned during the misty years when the early believers were trying to differentiate between the Judaism of their past and the new organism Jesus called "the church" in Matthew 18. Consequently, it is a book of practical considerations teeming with pedestrian-level spirituality. The question "What does a follower of Christ look like?" finds fertile soil in its pages.

James wrote to a cadre of Jewish believers who had placed their faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. They had patiently waited nearly twenty centuries for His arrival since the promises had been given in Haran to their ancestor Abraham. Of all people, they were familiar with guilt and the need for blood sacrifices to atone for their sins. They were well acquainted with the judgments of God, being familiar from childhood with everything from the exodus from Egypt, and all that happened to the Jews until the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt during the days of the prophet Malachi. They understood sin, righteousness, and judgment. Words like guilty and forgiveness were part of the warp and woof of their national identity.

The words of James winnowed like a refiner's fire, confronting his readers with the sobering connection between righteousness before God, and life in the streets of their exile. Perhaps that is why the words of James are so important for us who live about the same distance in time from him as he did from Abraham.

Most modern believers have at least a basic knowledge of sin and its consequences. We have learned that we are hopelessly bound to sin, and by ourselves we can do nothing to escape the judgment of God. The gospel is our only means of salvation. That's "Theology 101" for most of us.

But, what images actually come into your mind when you hear the words, *saved* or *salvation*? Are the phrases, *inviting Jesus into your heart*, *accepting Christ as your Savior*, or *going to heaven* the first things that pop into your mind regarding what it means to become a follower of Jesus? What's involved in being saved, anyway? More important, what's the *point* of salvation for your life *right now*?

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 2:1-13; James 2:14-26

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## STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. On the next page are two groups of verses that deal with this whole idea of being "saved." In a sentence or two, summarize the main ideas that emerge from each group.

a. **Group 1:** Romans 3:20-26; 5:1-2; 8:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 2:13

(Note: The verses in this group deal with what the Bible calls *justification*. Justification has two meanings. One is to officially declare or consider someone to be *not guilty*, but the other is even more significant: to recognize someone as *righteous*! The Greek word family related to the word for justification appears over forty times in the New Testament.)

b. **Group 2:** Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:21-22; 3:4; 2 Peter 3:10-13

(Note: These verses deal with the *future* aspects of salvation, the final and complete purification of our souls, our bodies, and the creation itself. It is these promises that many believers refer to when they talk about heaven. This is what Paul speaks of in Romans when he uses the word *glorification*.)

2. Review what you wrote above and summarize all that is true about people who put their faith in Jesus Christ to deal with their problem of sin and guilt before God.
  
3. Based on what you've discovered, do you think justification and glorification are instantaneous and final, or incremental and progressive? Explain your answer.
  
4. Below draw a horizontal line to represent your life as a follower of Jesus. Put a "J" (for justification) on your line to represent when you *became* a believer. Then put a "G" (glorification) at the end of your earthly life. Even though there are only two *points* on your line, there are actually *three* time periods represented. What are they?
  
5. When you think of yourself as being "saved," which of these three time periods do you normally think of? Why?

## LOOKING BACK...

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Two promises Christians often point to when sharing the gospel is that someone can be "forgiven" and they can "know for sure that they're going to heaven." We often encourage people to "invite Jesus into their hearts" to become partakers of these promises. Consequently, when many Christians talk about being "saved," they are thinking only of justification (the *beginning* of their life in Christ) and glorification (the *ending* point of our earthly life). The unfortunate outcome is that the rest of their life is left out! We have some vague sense of needing to "grow" and to "follow Christ," but we believe that salvation is finished for the most part at the very beginning.

But what if *saved* is a word legitimately used to refer to everything *between* the "J" and "G," too? What if there are three tenses to salvation: I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved? And what if only the first and last ones are already finished? What effect would that have regarding where our focus should be in this life?

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

6. God's intent for the period of time *between* the "J" and "G" on your line is something the New Testament writers refer to as *sanctification*. We often speak of it as "spiritual growth," or "spiritual transformation." Briefly summarize what you understood sanctification to be before you started this study. Be honest, thorough, and specific.
  
7. Look at your answer to question 3 on the previous page. How would you answer the same question about sanctification? Explain.
  
8. Paul wrote about sanctification in every letter preserved in the New Testament, though he didn't always use that word. Look up the following verses and record what each of them says or implies concerning the idea that salvation is a lifelong *process*:
  - a. 2 Corinthians 3:10-15 –
  
  - b. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 –
  
  - c. Philippians 2:12-13 –
  
  - d. Philippians 3:12-14 –

9. How do the comments you read in James in the Key Scriptures at the beginning of this chapter compare to what you've discovered from the passages in the previous question? (Reread James 2:14-26 if necessary.)
10. Paul says in Philippians 2:12-13, "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to *work out your salvation* with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (emphasis added).
- What does Paul say *God* is doing in their hearts?
  - What does he say *they* should be doing?
  - Why does Paul's command to them make such perfect sense?
  - Why do you think Paul tells them to have an attitude of "fear and trembling"?
11. Write out your new understanding of what it means to be "saved," using as much as you can from what you've learned from this chapter as possible.
12. What effect would focusing only on justification or glorification have on a believer's life?
13. What effect would neglecting to focus on sanctification have on a believer's life?
14. a. Up to this point in your Christian life, which of the three "time periods" of salvation (justification, sanctification, or glorification) have you thought about the most?
- What effect has this had on your spiritual growth?!

- c. Which “time period” have you focused on least?
- d. Do you think this has had any effect on your growth as a believer? Explain.
15. Now that you know sanctification represents the majority of your life because it is progressive and ongoing, how should this affect the following?
- a. Your relationship with God
- b. The way you share the gospel
- c. The way you arrange personal priorities and life goals

**SCRIPTURE MEMORY** (optional)

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- *God's* commitment to my sanctification – Philippians 2:12-13
- *My* commitment to my sanctification – Philippians 3:13-14