

Living the Christian Life

Lesson 1 – *Saved by God*

Saved by God

Welcome to Living the Christian Life.

As the name indicates, in this core seminar, we will be providing an introduction to basic themes of the Christian life. As a Christian, especially a new or younger Christian, we have what at times is the daunting task of living not like the world, but like Christ. Especially, if we are not raised in a Christian home, when we accept Christ, we are introduced to new truths that, as we grow in our understanding them, will help us live faithful Christian lives.

So the primary objective of the class is to answer the question, “What does it mean to live as a Christian?” If you’ll turn to your course outline, you’ll see we’ll be considering questions such as, “How does God speak to me?” “How do I talk to him?” “What is the church?” “And how am I to engage the world with the good news of Jesus Christ?”

These are the kinds of topics we’ll be addressing over the next 7 weeks -- basic questions that are fundamentally important to right Christian living. So this class is intended to be a practical study and is a natural follow-up to Christianity Explained and Two Ways to Live, core seminars that teach us who Christ is and what we must do to become a Christian. It’s also a great class to through which to disciple a new or young Christian or may even serve as a good reminder for someone who may have been a Christian for quite some time.

Before we begin today’s class, I want you to be aware that JSF touches on many different theological issues, as well as issues relating to practical Christian living. But remember, it is only a basics core seminar and many of those issues are addressed more fully in other core seminars. So, for instance, today, we’re looking at what it means to be saved by God. Well, that’s a large topic that is more fully and technically addressed in our excellent Systematic Theology core seminar. Moreover, many of our topics are also addressed more fully in “Living Ourselves,” which is in our Christian Life core seminar track. Good things of which to be mindful.

I. Introduction

We begin our study together by looking at the topic Saved by God. Why do we start with this topic? We begin with this great truth because it is foundational for understanding the Christian life and it has significant implications for how we live as Christians and how we view the world, and it should provide us with right motivations and confidence as we live a Godly life.

If you’re a Christian here this morning, you have come to the realization that you are a sinner, that God is holy and demands punishment for sin, and you have accepted Christ’s work on your behalf to pay for your sin. And at some level, you obviously recognize that salvation has come to you by God’s grace. But as Christians, understanding in our heads and even more so with our hearts what it is that God has done for us in salvation, how He has done it and why it has done it, are truths that we will challenge us throughout the remainder of our lives. It is no overstatement to say that we can never exhaust the mystery and wonder of the Gospel! As we grow in our understanding of God’s grace, we inevitably grow in our love for Him, in our desire for Him, and will become more like Him. So, if you’re a new Christian, our class today, hopefully, will water

the seed of knowledge that has led you to Christ, helping that knowledge in you to grow and bear fruit in your life.

The way we approach our material this morning is by first laying the foundation for understanding God's work in salvation. We do this by discussing the bad news about us versus the good news of the Gospel. Secondly, we look at God's action and purposes in salvation, and finally, we'll consider practically how understanding our first two points this morning help strengthen our walk with God as new believers.

II. The Bad news about us vs. the Good news of the Gospel

If you read Ephesians or just about any other epistle, when the authors want Christians to understand the miracle of salvation, they first remind those to whom they're writing how they lived apart from Christ and what they deserve apart from Christ. These two things are essential to understanding God's grace and the miracle of our salvation.

Let's look at just a couple passages to help us with this truth?

Ephesians 2:1-3

In this passage Paul begins by telling those gentile Christians to whom he's writing:

1As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

Q: So to sum up this first part, how does Paul describe these Christians before their conversion?

- . Dead in their transgressions
- . Following the spirit of disobedience
- . Gratifying the pleasures of our sinful nature, and
- . By our very nature, objects of God's wrath

Turn with me to Titus 3. Paul tells these Christians to whom he's writing:

3At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Q: Again, to sum up the description of humans before their conversion, how does Paul describe them?

- . Foolish and disobedient (toward God)
- . Deceived
- . Enslaved by sin
- . At war with one another: hated and being hated

For our purposes this morning, I want to highlight two of these descriptions, notable above the others because of the way they capture our spiritual helplessness before God.

First, in Titus 3, notice the descriptor enslaved. Paul uses this sort of language often. In Romans 6, for instance, he makes the point that all humans are slave to one of two things: either to righteousness or to sin.

So, the question before us is, what does it mean to be enslaved by sin? John Piper, in a sermon on Romans 6 summarizes what it means to be a slave to sin this way:

“We were all once slaves of sin. Not some of us. All of us. That is, we were not neutral, self-determining creatures standing before sin and righteousness, able to make our sovereign choice. We were slaves to sin from the beginning. Sin was master; we were not. Our wills were in bondage to the allurements of sin. Because of our corruption – the distortion of our values – we saw sin as more attractive than righteousness. So we were free, Paul says, in regard to righteousness. That is, it had no power to sway us. Righteousness didn't look attractive or rewarding. And so its appeals were powerless.”

Apart from Christ we are slaves to sin in the sense that we obey the sinful nature within us like a slave obeys his master. We do what we do because, well, we are slaves. We're under the complete control of our sinful nature.

The other image Paul uses in Ephesians 2 is that of a corpse. Paul says that in our former way of life, apart from Christ, we were dead in our trespasses and sin.

Well, what does it exactly mean to be dead in our sin? In many ways, it's kind of like the sum total of everything it means to be a sinner. Take all the descriptors of man apart from Christ and offer one word to sum all of them up, and the best word you can come up with is DEAD. It means to be:

- . enslaved to sin (Romans 6:17; John 8:34);
- . blinded in your mind so as not to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (II Corinthians. 4:4);
- . Deceived (Ephesians 2)
- . Hard-hearted and rebellious against God (Ephesians 4:18) (Romans 8:7)
- . In our minds, an enemy of God (Colossians 1:21)

Your will is enslaved, your spiritual mind is blinded and deceived, your heart is cold and dead, your whole disposition is hostile toward God.

Let's say you had a friend enslaved to a wicked master who only means him harm, but your friend is completely deceived so that he doesn't even comprehend his own slavery and the danger he is in, and, to boot, he's a hard-hearted enemy of the only person or thing that could, in fact, liberate him from his bondage...How would you describe that person? Hopeless comes to mind.

When the apostle Paul and other New Testament writers first describe the condition of man apart from Christ immediately before they remind them of the Gospel, that's the intended effect. We are hopeless. We are enslaved, and we are dead.

Q: Why is that important that Christians understand their state in sin apart from Christ?

A: Because understanding our state in sin is vitally important for understanding what it really means to be, in fact, saved by God.

Which leads us to the second part of our discussion this morning, Salvation is a work initiated by God, accomplished by God, according to God's purposes.

III. Salvation is a work initiated by God

The more you understand apart from Christ your mind, heart, and will are captive to sin so that you're are for all intents and purposes, spiritually dead, the more you understand that salvation could never have been initiated by you.

We've already mentioned the way we are described apart from Christ in Ephesians and Titus. But, praise God, Paul doesn't leave it there. In Ephesians 2, after Paul has reminded them of their helpless state, he then goes on to say:

4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

And in Titus 3, Paul says after describing them apart from Christ:

4But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

Q: In both passages who is responsible for initiating salvation?

A: God

You'll notice that in both Ephesians and Titus, the separation between Paul's description of humans apart from Christ and his following elaboration of the Gospel message is marked by the word BUT...and depending on your translation, it may actually say BUT GOD in both passages, which is the point of emphasis being conveyed regardless of your translation's precise wording.

Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones, a famous Welch preacher, has a famous sermon taken from Ephesians 2 entitled, "The Christian Message to the World," in which he spends the entire sermon laying out the glorious truth behind this one phrase: "But God."

He says: "With these two words we come to the introduction to the Christian message, the peculiar, specific message which the Christian faith has to offer to us. These two words, in and of themselves, in a sense contain the whole of the gospel. The gospel tells of what God has done, God's intervention; it is something that comes entirely from outside us and displays to us that wondrous and amazing and astonishing work of God."

The emphasis of action is on God, alone. By first reminding Christians in Ephesians 2 and Titus 3 of their enslavement to and hopelessness in sin, Paul prepares them (and us) to understand that were it not for God, we would never have asked for the salvation we need.

IV. Salvation is carried through to completion by God

I've already noted that salvation is initiated by God, but even more than that, at every stage of the process, God is there acting to bring our salvation to completion.

It's easy, I think, to think of salvation in very man-centered way: I chose Christ. I accepted Christ. I believed God. It's easy to do this in part because, at superficial level, that's all true.

However, Scripture makes it clear that our faith, which we exercise in repentance and belief, too is a gift from God, dependent upon God changing our hearts.

Again, Paul's image of the spiritual corpse comes in handy. Before we accept Christ, it's not as though, and contrary to what many teach, that we are sick in our sin and that with a little medicine of the Word and some strong, personal will power, we can kind of nurse ourselves back to spiritual health.

This view tends to see God in the work of salvation as kind of doctor, who writes the prescription and recommends bed, rest, and a diet and if we follow the regimen then we'll get better. But based upon what we know of ourselves from Scripture, such a view of God's work in salvation doesn't take. If God merely gave us the directions for salvation and eternal life and then left it up to us to follow them, we would be in shape...Because, it's hard for a corpse to follow directions. If left to himself, man would remain forever in his sin. As Romans 3:10 states, **"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God."**

(Mention Packer quote on outline)

Were in not for God working in us, regenerating us by His Holy Spirit, we never would have acted in faith and trusted Christ. (faith is a gift of God / don't turn faith into works righteousness / Eph. 2:8-9)

Romans 8:29-30, is probably the best single passage describing God's complete work of salvation:

"For those foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

In this verse you see a progression of God's activity in the work of salvation ...all the way from God's choosing, to His calling, to justifying, to our eventual glorification.

Q: Who is it that chooses? God. Who is it that calls? God. Who is it that justifies? God. Who is it that glorifies?God.

A great way to take this out of the abstract for a minute is to consider one of the more famous personal testimonies of how one comes to Christ made by the great, famous preacher Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon held firmly to his conviction that salvation is a work of God from start to finish. This was central to his beliefs about how all men come to Christ. Of his own experience, in his own words, he explained to his congregation:

"I can well remember the manner in which I learned the doctrines of grace in a single instant. I was sitting in the house of God one day and a thought struck my mine, 'How did I come to be converted?' I prayed. I then wondered, 'How did I come to pray?' I was induced to pray – by reading the Scriptures. 'How came I to read the Scriptures?' And then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all and that He is the Author of faith. It was then that the whole doctrine opened up to me from which I have not departed."

V. Salvation is for God's glory according to His OWN purposes

Stepping back for a minute... We've concluded that man is enslaved, blind, deceived and, if that weren't enough, also dead, according to Scripture. And, we've seen that salvation, therefore, is a work initiated by God and brought to completion in a believer's life by God.

We've just about got our bases covered before we look practically at why understanding these things will help us in our Christian life— with the exception of one final question? Why does God save us?

Before we highlight what motivates God to save us, we should be clear what does not motivate God's saving action towards us: our righteousness or our intrinsic qualities.

*Going back once again to Titus 3:4-5 we read, "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, NOT because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

From this verse we notice what does and does not motivate God's saving action toward us:

- God's action is NOT motivated by our righteousness.
- God's action IS motivated by His love and mercy.

We've already mentioned our helpless state apart from Christ. It was when we were enemies and rebels against God that He saved us --- not when we were at peace with God and obeying Him. (Romans 9:11-13 / Esau v. Jacob)

**Secondly, God's saving action is not based on any inherent quality/goodness that we may or may not have as a person. This truth goes all the way back to the Old Testament with regard to God's choosing of Israel. In Deuteronomy 7, Moses tells the Israelites why they were chosen by God to be His people. And the reason is noticeably about God's character and not about the intrinsic qualities of the Israelites:

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that Lord set His love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it was because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath which He swore to your fathers..." (Also, Abram and idol worshipper when called by God / Paul a persecutor of Christians when called, etc....)

God's purposes in saving a people for Himself are not motivated by our righteousness or some special quality we possess.

So, if it's not based on us, then what does motivate God's saving action? Well, for those of you wanting a complete and all satisfying answer, I'll just say that you'll need much more than this class. In fact you'll need all eternity to answer this question.

But, at bare minimum, we all must be satisfied with two clear facts from Scripture: 1) God saves us for His glory and 2) according to His own purposes, good pleasure, and will. This obviously, is not meant to be an exhaustive look into why God saves, but, these two aspects of God's saving work are important for understanding salvation.

In terms of God's glory, let me just highlight a few passages of scripture:...

I Peter 2:9, **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”**

Three times in Ephesians 1 Paul highlights the great purpose of God in his electing work:

. FIRST, Ephes. 1:4-6 **4For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5he[3] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- 6to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”**

. SECOND, Ephes. 1:11-12 **“11In him we were also chosen,[5] having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.”**

. THIRD, Ephes. 1:13b-14, **“Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.”**

These verses underscore the God-centeredness of salvation. God's whole plan of redemption is NOT to glorify man. Rather it's to make much of God and to glorify Him. And as we realize that God is responsible from beginning to end for our salvation, it fomented within us a great desire to praise God and His name, giving Him the glory for what He's done for us.

Secondly, God saves us according to His Good pleasure and purposes.

In 2 Tim. 1:9 Paul writes, **“(God) who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”**

Or consider Ephesians 1:4-5 Paul writes, **“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”**

Now, we already know it's not because of righteousness or because there is something unique and special about us that other people may or may not possess. So, ultimately, why does God save us, specifically? Well, in these two verses, we see that this question, can only be answered by a simple “according to God's will and good pleasure and His OWN purposes and grace.”

That modifier OWN used by Paul in 2 Timothy is really a powerful word. When Paul says that God saves us according to His OWN purposes, we are immediately confronted with the huge gulf between us and God. We ultimately don't know why we have become the beneficiaries of God's wonderful gift of salvation. Instead, we accept it as a Divine gift and trust that God's ways are perfect and just and that He knows best how to glorify Himself.

So God saves us for His glory according to His own purposes, will, and good pleasure.

To summarize our class this far:

- Apart from Christ we are enslaved to and dead in sin
- God initiates and completes the work of our salvation
- His reasons for doing so are not based upon our righteousness, choices, or intrinsic qualities, BUT according to God's own purposes, will, and good pleasure.

VI. Practical Application/ Why important for you as a new Christians

Now we come to the practical application part of this class. The premise of this class and the reason we begin this core seminar with the them of saved by God is because we believe that better understanding this wonderful truth is vital for living a more faithful Christian life.

Humility

Q: Why would understanding God's action on our behalf in salvation promote humility in us?

A: Realizing the extent of our helplessness in sin and God's saving action towards us can elicit no other attitude but humility because we have nothing left in which to boast save the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14)

According to John Piper, humility is one of the effects of grace. He writes, ***“Grace not only means God is for you, it also means you did not earn or deserve what you got. It is free. That's what grace means. He cites Romans 11:6 ‘If it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.’ Grace by definition means you didn't earn it and therefore can't boast. The only proper response is humility.” Humility, then leads to thankfulness, greater love, and ultimately to praise.***

Assurance of Salvation

For many Christians assurance of salvation is a big issue and often a hindrance to spiritual growth. The truth that we are saved by God should be a tremendous help to our confidence. There are two primary ways to look at assurance of salvation: subjective and objective assurance.

Subjective assurance is obtained by looking at your life, examining your love for God and others, the fruit that's in your life as evidence that you are Christian. But, it's common for even the strongest saints to go through periods of doubt about their salvation, even if all arrows point to one's salvation. What do we do then? Well, it's such times that it's very important to consider our objective assurance in Christ.

The ground of objective assurance is that God's purpose in the salvation of his people is invincible--it cannot fail--because it is based not on our choosing God but on God's choosing us.

Ephesians 1:4, says the God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. So, our salvation began before the creation of the universe when God planned the history of redemption, ordained the death and the resurrection of his Son, and chose us to be his own through Christ.

This is our great objective ground for assurance, and it should give new believers great confidence and hope.

If it is God who saves for His glory, according to His purposes in eternity, then His commitment to His glory and the fulfillment of His purposes results in His enduring commitment to us.

We've already mentioned Romans 8 in reference to the work of salvation being God's from beginning to end. Well, that same passage, as you may know, is also one of the greatest passages for hope and confidence in our salvation. And the hope Paul talks about is grounded in the truth that God has saved us --- not according to anything we've done --- but according to His purposes.

If God has saved us, then He has committed Himself to us and He will complete the work of our salvation.

A few passages to highlight this point:

. I Thessalonians 5:23-24, **“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”**

. Philippians 1:6, **“being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”**

. 1 Corinthians 1:8, **“He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”**

. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, **“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”**

Proper motivation: Works done out of love, not fear and/or pride

In Ephesians 2, again, we read, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Here we see that we are saved...not as if the sole purpose was for us to escape God's wrath... but rather to bring glory to God. And the way we do this is by doing good works that we were created in Christ Jesus to accomplish. So in the first part of verse 8, Paul makes clear that works are not the reason for our salvation, but rather a reflection of who we are in Christ and what we've been created for.

So our whole motivate for “being/doing good” as some would say takes a seismic shift. Works now are never done to merit our salvation, or because we are afraid that if we don't do them we may lose our salvation. No, we do good works because we love God for who He is, how has saved us, and because we desire to live up to our calling in Christ Jesus and see Him glorified in our lives.

As Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, **“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”**

VII. Conclusion

There are many other things we could consider. We could dwell in the truth that it is God who saves and the subsequent implications such truth has for our lives. Hopefully, this class will help fuel a desire to understand the grace of God more and to praise Him for His saving work on your behalf.

Let's pray.