

Words

TO LIVE BY



COMMUNITY

FALL 2020





INTRODUCTION



Words to Live By

The simple truth of the Gospel is that Christ came into the world to redeem sinners. What God does in Christ is truly amazing. He takes sinners, separated from God because of sin, and reconciles them to Himself. Though the Gospel is simple to proclaim, much is going on behind the scenes in the moment of salvation. There is grace, adoption, propitiation, justification, reconciliation, regeneration, faith, election, substitution, perseverance, sanctification, and glorification all wrapped up in the “Good News” of Christ.

The study you are about to begin attempts to unpack some of the nuanced theology of the Gospel. It’s a closer look at the core doctrines of the Cross in order to help us comprehend the magnitude of our salvation and the infinite greatness of our God. As believers, these are words we can live by. While we couldn’t possibly offer a full explanation of each subject in the format at hand, we hope the lessons to follow will offer insights into the great mystery of the Gospel. But above all, we hope this study will bring a greater assurance of our faith in Christ.



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THE GOSPEL

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The Gospel is “the good news that sinful man can be reconciled to God through faith in Christ’s finished work on the cross.”

Seen in Scripture:

Flowing from divine origin, offered as a gracious gift from a merciful God, the Gospel is given to whomever places their faith in Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death (1 Tim. 1:11, 15-16). In short, the Gospel is the saving work of Christ for sinners (2 Tim. 1:8-10; 2:8). The Gospel brings hope to sinners stuck in darkness. As John Scott says, "moved by the perfection of this holy love, God in Christ substituted himself for us sinners." The Gospel is a story about redemption and imputation. God, because of this love (1 John 4:10), takes a heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh (Eze. 36:26). The sinner's heart will be renewed (regenerated) to a right relationship with God (1 Thess. 3:13). In turn, the Gospel restores access to God. No longer does the sinner need to fear standing before a Holy God. By the redeeming blood of Christ, we can enter His presence with confidence (Heb. 10:19).

For Everyday Life:

The "Good News" never stops being good news in our life here on earth. No matter how long you've been in Christ, the Good News is that salvation is found outside of us. Yet, we so easily take the message of the Gospel for granted. Our flesh on this earth lies to us. It draws us away from trusting in Christ's action and leads us to trust in our actions. We start to tamper with the message of the Gospel in our minds. The awesomeness of the message that "God chose us ONLY because of His great love for us," can slowly shift into, "He chose us because of how much good I've done for Him." A message of grace and mercy slow turns into a message of merit. And just like that we are once again living under the Law, trying to claw our way to God.

The good news of the Gospel is that we are granted access to God through Christ's work on the Cross. Regardless of how long you've been in Christ, it's always that simple. It's never what we have done, but always what Christ has done. Dear Christian, never lose sight of that basic yet transformative declaration: The Gospel comes through Christ alone.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.



Questions

- How simple of a definition can you give for “what is the Gospel?”
- In a Gospel presentation, what elements need to be present? How much detail do you need to offer to confidently say you’ve shared the Gospel?
- Is a full understanding of the gospel necessary for our salvation?
- It’s been said we should “preach the Gospel to ourselves everyday.” What does this functionally look like in the life of the believer?

JUSTIFICATION

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

Justification is a legal declaration in which God pardons the sinner of all his or her sins and accepts and accounts the sinner as righteous in His sight.

Seen in Scripture:

Justification is an act of God, declared upon those who have placed their faith in the finished work of Christ (Rom. 3:21-26). Being justified, we have peace with God because the enmity that once separated us has been reconciled through Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Our relationship is completely different with God after our justification. Instead of regarding Him with fear and dread, "we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1-10).

With any doctrine, but especially with justification, language matters as we describe the details of what is happening. Justification is being "declared righteous." "Declare" is the important word in that sentence. We are declared righteous, not "made" righteous. We will still sin, we will still look the same in the flesh. But before God, our standing is night and day different. In justification, God views us as if we've never sinned and as if we have done everything right (Gal. 2:15-21).

For Everyday Life:

The doctrine of justification is central to the protestant religion. The very thing we were "protesting" against the Roman Catholic Church in the Reformation was justification through faith alone. Calvin says justification is "the main hinge on which religion turns." Theologically we all boldly declare we are justified by faith alone, yet practically we have the tendency to live in such a way that denies this declaration. We struggle to believe that we're good with God on the basis of Christ alone. This struggle comes because we don't feel justified. We look at ourselves, knowing our sin and corruption, and declare that until we feel saved, we're not saved.

But justification doesn't care about our feelings. It doesn't care about our actions. It doesn't care if we fully believe in it or not. Justification is found and established outside of us. It's declared upon us and is final the moment of its declaration. The assurance of our justification is found exclusively in God. We can rest assured that God is good with us because He has declared that we are righteous in Christ.

Galatians 2:15-21

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.



Questions

- Having been justified, we are guaranteed heaven. Why do we struggle to believe that declaration?
- Justification is something that we should celebrate. Yet often, it is something we wrestle to cope with. How can justification by faith alone be used to bolster our assurance, rather than test it?
- Justification refers to a legal status. In this court we play the defendant and God is the judge. If this is so, what is the verdict rendered to the justified, guilty or not guilty?
- When does justification occur?
- Are there any sins that can prevent our justification or overturn God's verdict?

REGENERATION

WHAT IS REGENERATION?

Regeneration is the Holy Spirit's work in making people who are dead in their sin, alive together with Christ.

Seen in Scripture:

Scripture testifies that no one can be justified and have peace with God apart from faith in Christ (Gen. 15:6; Gal. 2:16). Old Testament believers looked forward by faith to Christ, through the types and shadows of their time (Heb. 11). Through faith, we now perceive more clearly those same promises as being fulfilled in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 12:1-2). But Scripture also makes clear man's utter inability to turn to God (Rom. 3:9-12). Paul described us as being dead in our sins (Eph. 2:1-3). Just as a dead man cannot choose to bring himself to life, we do not have the power in and of ourselves to have faith in Christ. If being dead weren't enough, we are also hostile toward God (Rom. 8:7). How then can anyone be saved?

This is where we learn of the power of God in regeneration. We read of regeneration in the book of John. He begins his book by stating that the children of God are not born of blood (physical birth or a certain ethnic background), or of the "will of the flesh nor of the will of man" (not from any power in man). Instead, the will of God gave His chosen ones "the right to become children of God" (John 1:12-13). Then in chapter three, we read of Jesus' conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Jesus states, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Water symbolizes purification from the defilement of sins. As we have seen in this study, this purification only comes through the work of Christ. "The Spirit" speaks directly to the Holy Spirit's application of Christ's work to us. This work of regeneration is not a choice on our part—we are completely passive in it. Jesus calls it a new birth and compares the Spirit's work to the wind. We did not choose to be born to our parents and we do not choose to become the children of God. We cannot control the wind, but it blows where it wills. In regeneration,

the Spirit wills us alive in Christ. We who were dead are now alive. We who were hostile to God are now friends of God. Only after we are regenerated do the inseparable and necessary fruits of faith and obedience follow (Eph. 2:8-10).

For Everyday Life:

Understanding the Spirit's work of regeneration should be of great encouragement to the believer. As we properly understand the depths of our sin and misery, we better see the hatred we had for God and our disbelief of His word. If salvation were our choice, we would have no solid footing for assurance. But the Father chose us before the foundation of the world, the Son redeemed us through His life, death, and resurrection, and the Holy Spirit applies the Son's redeeming work to us and seals us for the day of redemption. We rejoice that salvation is ours, not by the strength of our own will or merits, but by our gracious and glorious God who does not change. In regeneration, the Holy Spirit turns our hatred for God to love and our disbelief to faith. In it we rejoice in what God has done for us and rest assured of His good favor toward us (1 Pet. 1:3-9).

Ezekiel 36:25-27

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.



Questions

- From a purely personal perspective, it seems like regeneration follows faith. But what is the significance of regeneration actually preceding faith? How does this truth shape your understanding of salvation?
- Read 2 Corinthians 2:14 and Romans 10:17. How can these two passages both be correct?
- What are some of the ongoing benefits of regeneration?
- How does your consideration of regeneration affect your esteem of the person and work of the Holy Spirit?

FAITH

WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith is trusting God by believing what He has told us in His word.

Seen in Scripture:

The common link between all verses describing our salvation is the presence of faith. Every time the Gospel is proclaimed, faith is always a part of the description. Faith is clearly the catalyst for salvation: "for by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8), "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25), "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring" (Rom. 4:16), "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Faith comes before sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

So what is faith exactly? Faith is trusting that even though we have not yet seen the fulfillment of God's promises, we believe they will happen exactly as God promised they would. As Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

For Everyday Life:

Faith is very simple, yet at the same time, it's extremely difficult to comprehend. Faith is trusting God, believing what He has told us. As J.I. Packer says, "Faith is the link between ourselves and a God of transforming love who saves us from sin, folly, and ultimate disaster and who brings us into a life of joy, peace, wisdom and fruitfulness." Yet faith can be easily misunderstood and mislabeled. Faith is more than a general optimism for the future. Faith is also more than just rote knowledge on the subject of the Bible. Faith is more than hope or hopefulness about the future. Faith is about trust. Trusting that what God has said is true and responding in faith. In connection to the promises of God, faith is believing what God has said will come to pass.

It's only natural to want measure our faith in order to determine if we have enough to make it into heaven. But how much faith do we actually need to have to be saved? We long for the assurance that we're enough, that we've checked all the right boxes. But this is the wrong way to think about faith and salvation. God is not going to reject you if you don't have the right amount. Because He's not concerned with the amount of your faith, He's concerned with the object of your faith.

It's interesting how we can turn faith into a work. We start judging ourselves to determine whether we've conjured up enough faith yet to assure us of our salvation. This thinking will always leave us lacking. God does not care about the quantity of our faith, He's only concerned with the object of our faith.

Hebrews 10:19-25

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.



Questions

- We often fall victim to judging others' faith, "ranking" our faith against fellow believers, or trying to judge whether someone is saved or not. We admire those who seem to have a lot of faith, and dismiss those whose faith appears weak to us. How does this go against the message of the Gospel?
- What is the object of our faith and what false objects do we so regularly trust in instead?
- Discuss how biblical faith, that is faith in a sure thing, differs from a modern definition of faith?
- How does faithfulness differ from faith? How can faithfulness be a positive quality? How can faithfulness be a negative quality?
- Consider faith as it relates to belief and to assurance. Can it be defined without the presence of both elements (Hebrews 11:1)? What does "weak" faith look like?

PROPTIATION

WHAT IS PROPITIATION?

Propitiation is the loving work of God Himself, in which He manifested and fully satisfied His holy and righteous wrath against us in the death of Jesus Christ.

Seen in Scripture:

The word propitiation only appears in the New Testament four times, but the idea of it runs throughout the entire Bible. We have no Gospel without propitiation. Paul's argument in Romans makes this clear. He begins by detailing how God's wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (1:18). In chapter two, He speaks of a day of wrath "when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." All humanity is under sin and is accountable to God as violators of His holy law (3:9-20). This is our great problem—we deserve the wrath of our Creator and are completely powerless to change our standing before Him by works of the law (3:20). "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (3:21-22). What is this righteousness? "We are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith" (3:24-25). By His sacrificial death for our sins, Christ pacified the wrath of God. We receive this by faith, and since "we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God" (5:9).

For Everyday Life:

When you think of God's wrath being pacified or appeased in the death of Christ, you may very well have a pagan ceremonial sacrifice in mind. You have probably seen these depicted in movies. A cultish group lowers some poor soul into molten lava in order to calm the anger of their god. This is a man-centered view of salvation. Through this lens, we see ourselves as the ones trying to make peace with God. This view is not biblical. In fact, propitiation is put forward in Scripture to convince those who have animosity toward God (that's everyone, including you) of God's love for us.

John writes, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). In the many sorrows, pains, and sins of life, we often wonder how God could be for us. When you find yourself doubting God's love and good favor toward you, consider the proof of His love in propitiation. The Father chose you in love and sent His Son to make peace through the blood of His cross. The Son, in full accord with the Father's loving and gracious choice, willingly stood condemned in your place, though no sin was found in Him. "Behold what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1)

Isaiah 53:4-10

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief...



Questions

- What are some prefigured types of propitiation in the Old Testament that ultimately lead us to Christ on the cross? What are their significance when considered in light of Christ?
- Why can't God just look the other way or simply forget our sins? Why was it necessary for Him to punish our sins in Christ?
- How does God's holiness and love as seen in propitiation affect your view of sin and your esteem of Him?

SUBSTITUTION

WHAT IS SUBSTITUTION?

Substitution: Jesus, being truly God and truly man, took our place, bearing our sin and becoming a curse for us, in order to redeem us.

Seen in Scripture:

As we look back on the history of redemption and the types and shadows pointing to Christ, it's no surprise that He would suffer and die as our substitute. We see substitution from the very beginning of the story. A bloody death occurred after Adam and Eve's sin, yet it was not their own, but an animal standing in their place (Gen. 3:21). God provided a ram to die in the place of Isaac (Gen. 22:9-14). A lamb without blemish was killed and its blood painted on the doorpost in Egypt, sparing each family the death of their firstborn (Exo. 12:12-13). The symbolism of substitution was made even more clear by the laying on of hands, identifying the animal as an acceptable offering in place of the offerer (Lev. 1:1-5). Isaiah spoke of the suffering servant who would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities (Isa. 53:4-5). It's no wonder John the Baptist proclaimed of Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) Paul wrote of Jesus as our substitute on the cross, redeeming us by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). Though Jesus had committed no sin, He suffered once for our sins, the righteous One suffering in the place of the unrighteous (1 Pet. 2:22; 3:18).

For Everyday Life:

As we consider the substitution seen in the many animal sacrifices under the Old Covenant, we must consider how Jesus' sacrifice is different, since it only needed to occur once. The book of Hebrews details the traditional system of sacrifices and mediators, illuminating Christ as the better sacrifice and mediator. The sacrificial provisions of atonement in the Old Covenant could never take away sins and therefore needed to be offered continually (Heb. 10:4). The priests were appointed as mediators between God and man. Because of their own sin, they were suited to deal gently

with the people, but it also made them weak, having to make sacrifices for their own sin as well (5:1-3). Just as the animal sacrifices had to be continually offered, the priests were also prevented from continuing to offer them because of their own eventual deaths (7:23). This system pointed to Christ's work of redemption, but its weaknesses also pointed to Him because we needed something better. Being truly God and truly man, He is able to serve as our perfect Mediator, sympathizing with our weaknesses and having been tempted as we are, yet without sin (4:14-15). Being without sin, He offered Himself as the perfect, once and for all substitute for our sins (10:14). In His resurrection, His perfection was vindicated, and He always lives to make intercession for us (7:22-25). What does Christ's substitution give us that the former things could not? Assurance! In Christ, we draw near to the throne of grace with confidence (4:16) and have a hope that is a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul (6:19-20; 10:19-23).

John 1:1-5, 9-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to his own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about Him, and cried out, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.'") For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.



Questions

- Read the passage from John above and 1 Timothy 2:5. Some believe Jesus was truly God and only appeared as a man. Some believe He was not God at all, but only a very good man. Why is it vital we hold to Jesus as being truly God and truly man?
- Is salvation possible outside of substitutionary atonement?
- Considering the last question, when sharing the faith with others, should we primarily talk about Jesus or our own religious experience?
- Read Hebrews 2:17-18. How does this comfort you?

RECONCILIATION

WHAT IS RECONCILIATION?

Reconciliation is the peace between God and the elect brought about by the expiation of sin (dealing with our offense before God) and the propitiation of God's righteous wrath (dealing with His just punishment for our offense).

Seen in Scripture:

It has been said that the story of Scripture can be summed up in the word reconciliation. Scripture begins in Eden, where God created Adam and Eve, and where they enjoyed a peaceful relationship with Him (Gen. 1:27ff). A few short pages into the story, Adam and Eve broke that peace by violating their covenant with God (Gen. 3). In their new state of sin, our first parents' response to the presence of God was to run and hide (Gen. 3:8). In His holiness, God expelled them from the garden—away from His peaceful presence (Gen. 3:22-24). From there the story unfolds with episode upon episode of man's rebellion against God and God's wrath against man. And yet the thread of God's relentless pursuit of this race of rebels runs through the entire story. Even as we see God's wrath revealed against sin, we also see amazing examples of His grace and mercy. We see both His anger toward and love for sinners. These are breadcrumbs in the story, types and shadows, leading us to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:26-27). It's in Jesus that God's wrath and love meet, resulting in peace between God and man. In Christ, God showed Himself to be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). Through Christ, He "reconciled to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). Peace through blood. Jesus atoned for our offense before God and absorbed the wrath of His Father against our offense, resulting in peace—a reconciled relationship between God and the people of His own choosing (Heb. 9:11-15).

For Everyday Life:

The reconciled relationship we have with God through the finished work of Christ reverberates through our relationships with one another as well. In Ephesians, Paul puts humanity into two groups, Jews and Gentiles—those who were near to the covenants of promise and those who were far off.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” (Eph. 2:13-16)

As believers, we are called to reconciled relationships with one another. In this unity that Scripture calls the church, the bride and body of Christ, we are enabled to fulfill (though imperfectly) the righteous requirement of the law, summed up in love of God and love of neighbor. Paul urges us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling (Eph. 4:1-3). We are told to put to death the things that are opposed to love of God and neighbor, and put on the things that promote love of God and neighbor (Col. 3:5-17). As you consider the peace you have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, soften yourself to the Spirit’s work of peace to those around you, “forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:30ff).

Colossians 1:15-22

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him.



Questions

- The original sin in the garden seems slight in comparison to the punishment that it elicited. Why was the offense of this sin so great that it warranted separation from God and subsequently the death of God's Son for reconciliation?
- Considering reconciliation as the primary theme of the Bible, how should we view sections of the Bible that seemingly have little to do with it?
- Through reconciliation we are led to a unity with God and with each other. Why is Christian unity meant to be enjoyed in light of the gospel (read Phil. 2:1-11)?

ADOPTION

WHAT IS ADOPTION?

Adoption is “the action or fact of legally taking another’s child and bringing it up as one’s own.” Biblically speaking, adoption occurs when we are transferred from the domain of darkness into the family of God, and given Christ’s name.

Seen in Scripture:

To understand salvation, we must first see ourselves as orphans. We were abandoned to a life of destruction. Scripture describes us as “sons of disobedience,” “children of wrath,” and “dead in their trespasses and sins.” Our family name was known only for death and destruction (Romans 5:12). We were hopeless unless someone stepped in to help. But, by God’s rich and overwhelming mercy, “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). We now have the right to cry “Abba! Father!” because we are sons of God (Gal. 4:3-7).

For Everyday Life:

Most of us grow up assuming our proper birthright and dreaming of a bright future. We look to our parents for both guidance and protection. We take for granted the simple acts of love we receive, like piggyback rides and family movie nights. We naturally assume the safety net of our parents and family will always be there. Everything will be okay because we’ve got a name—their name.

When we deny our need for adoption it takes the glory away from God. But when we recognize what actually happens at the foot of the cross - our rescue! - it allows us once again to proclaim the greatness of the God whose grace turns hopeless rebels into precious children. We, who were once far off, can now call God “father.”



Questions

- Adoption carries not only the status and name of a family but all of the legal attachments as well. We are subordinate to God, who is our superior. In a more crude sense, God claims ownership of us, who are his vassals. How does Ephesians 5:21-33 use marriage to articulate this picture of adoption?

Consider the following truths and discuss how they have impacted your relationship with God:

- Our adoption gives us the privilege to call God Father.
(John 1:12, Matt. 6:9-13)
- Our adoption gives us power over sin.
(1 Cor. 15:56-57, Rom. 6:1-14)

- Our adoption frees us from bondage and gives us a heavenly inheritance. (Eph. 1:3-6)
- Because of our adoption, we are given the Holy Spirit as our helper. (Rom. 8:15-16)
- Our adoption is not dependent upon any of our works. (Gal. 3:23-26)
- Our adoption gives us the hope of Christ's return. (1 John 3:1-3)

ELECTION

WHAT IS ELECTION?

Election is “God choosing a particular person or group of people to a particular task or relationship, especially eternal life.”

Seen in Scripture:

Election is the teaching that God, before the creation of the world, chose to elect some to salvation. His election was not based on any foreseen decision or quality in these people. Instead, it was based solely on the sovereign will of God (Rom. 8:28-30). The foundation for election is based on what is in God, not what is in man (Eph. 1:4-5). God didn't choose to save any person because God knew "they were worth it," or "they would make it up to Him by their personal sacrifice later." He chose us for salvation because He decided to bestow His love and grace upon us (John 15:15-16), not because of any inherent quality we might naturally possess. God's good pleasure is the only reason for us being plucked out of darkness and placed in the light of Christ (1 Cor. 1:26-30).

For Everyday Life:

God chose you! Every person in Christ, every person in the family of God, was specifically and personally chosen by God to be a part of this family. Just imagine, God had you individually in His mind when He determined to save you. You weren't just a number, or a quota He had to fill; He thought of you by name and determined to save YOU. At times the doctrine of election has been looked down upon because of the force of the declaration. We don't like to be told what we're going to do. Yet Romans 8 is very clear, "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." There is no upsetting that chain of events. While some might struggle saying it's a violation of their will, I say this divine chain reaction is one that should make us feel uniquely loved by God. It's interesting how we can turn faith into a work. We start judging ourselves to determine whether we've conjured up enough faith yet to assure us of our salvation.

This thinking will always leave us lacking. God does not care about the quantity of our faith, He's only concerned with the object of our faith.

Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.



Questions

- Predestination has become such a buzz word in today's church. Why is it perhaps the most offensive term to some Christians?
- Many have asked "Why doesn't God choose to save everyone?" Knowing that He doesn't choose to save everyone, how does this change how you view your election?
- If God has predetermined everything, why should we pray for or evangelize the lost?
- Seeing all the clear teaching about election and predestination in the Bible, why do we still struggle with and dislike it?

SANCTIFICATION

WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

Sanctification is the gracious and continuous work of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers us more and more from the power of sin, renews us in the image of God, and enables us to do good works.

Seen in Scripture:

We have already seen that justification is a work outside of ourselves and is not the result of any effort on our part. Mere moral improvement could never give us a right standing before God (Gal. 2:15-16). Similarly, sanctification is not mere moral improvement, but is the fruit of our union with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 15:4; Gal. 5:22). It necessarily follows regeneration and justification, yet is just as certain a reality for the believer (Rom. 8:28-30). In Christ, we understand more and more the true holiness of God and our sinfulness. Consider Isaiah's response to being in the presence of God, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isa. 6:1-8) This same response continually increases in the life of the believer, causing us to hate sin more and more and put to death the "old man" with its desires (Gal. 5:16-24; Col. 3:5). While this mortification of the body of sin occurs, the Spirit strengthens us and enables us to please God through obedience, something the law could never do in and of itself (Rom. 8:1-8; Col. 3:1-3, 12-15).

For Everyday Life:

Read Romans 7:15-19. Paul describes here what many of us are afraid to say even to our closest friends. We think after so many years of being a Christian, we should be able to give a report of the victorious Christian life we are living. To admit we struggle with sin (and very likely it's the same sin over and over), seems like a great defeat. And yet the Apostle Paul wrote this in a letter that would circulate throughout the churches in his time and consequently to the end of time. The struggle is real for all of us who are in Christ. It is the evidence of the Spirit's work of sanctification in

us. As He causes us to hate sin and enables us to obey, a great war takes place between our inner being and the law of sin that dwells in our body (Rom. 7:22-23). In fact, the time to worry is when you stop feeling this struggle. Paul's encouragement to us is not found in us. As Isaiah called out in ruin, Paul cries out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24) His immediate answer, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:25) Though we struggle in our sanctification, we must remember that like our justification, it has been secured for us by Jesus Christ and through our union with Him in the Holy Spirit. Although it is gradual and never perfected on this side of eternity, in it our faith is strengthened—resting more and more in the finished work of Christ and striving more and more in the new life we enjoy in Him.

Colossians 3:1-17

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.



Questions

- How can your (or one's) ongoing struggle with sin be evidence of sanctification? What does struggling with sin look like? (Read Psalm 51:17 and 1 John 1:5-10.)
- What is our role in sanctification?
- What are some of the means God uses for our sanctification? (Example: consider Heb. 10:24-25)
- What is the purpose of good works?

PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS

WHAT IS PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS?

Preservation of the saints asserts that once a person is truly “born of God” or “regenerated” by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, nothing in heaven or earth “shall be able to separate (them) from the love of God” (Rom. 8:39).

Seen in Scripture:

The promise of eternal life is confirmed by God Himself. Our salvation is made sure the moment of our regeneration. Romans 5:1 declares we “have been justified.” There is no going back on that justification. Later in Romans, Paul lays out the “golden chain of salvation.” In 8:30 he states, “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Our preservation to the end is just as sure as our calling was in the beginning. But this doesn’t take away our fear of the “what if” – What if I fall from grace? This is why Paul continues and states, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:38-39). There is nothing left that might take us away from the hope of heaven.

For Everyday Life:

The question “What if I don’t make it to heaven?” keeps many up at night. What if I fail in my faith? What if I’m not good enough for God? What if I don’t know enough Scripture? What if I don’t read the Bible enough? What if I “out sin” God’s grace? This list goes on and on. We conjure up countless ways to fall from grace and be cast out of heaven. But none of them stand up to the truth of Scripture. If our salvation was by grace alone from the very beginning, then no amount of sinning or failing can ever disqualify us from the grace of God.

Beyond that, consider that God is outside of space and time. He knew everything we would ever do in our lifetimes. He knew what you'd struggle with and the sins you would commit. Nothing you do will catch God off-guard and make Him reconsider sustaining your salvation. This is becoming a consistent theme throughout all these lessons, but our preservation is assured because it finds its foundation not in us, but in Christ. We can't trust ourselves. We will fail and make mistakes. We will constantly prove that we are faithless, and yet, He will continue to prove Himself faithful (2 Tim. 2:13).

Romans 8:31-39

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.



Questions

- When we say “preservation” we’re saying something is being preserved. What is being “preserved” in the saints?
- Consider Philippians 1:6. How can the means of our preservation lead us to rest in Christ and take comfort in the Holy Spirit?
- In what ways does the Preservation of the Saints point us to unity more than anything else?
- How should the knowledge that God is preserving you until the end change how you live now?

GLORIFICATION

WHAT IS GLORIFICATION?

Glorification is the consummation and full realization of our redemption, perfecting both our body and soul, secured for us through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Seen in Scripture:

When we die, we are immediately absent from our body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23). Death is the completion of our sanctification as our spirits are ushered into the presence of God without sin (Heb. 12:23). While this must be such sweet joy, it is still not the final step in our redemption. Humanity began in the garden with Adam and Eve. Before their fall, our first parents enjoyed fellowship with God. The covenant God had with them included a curse of death upon breaking it (Gen. 2:17). Necessarily understood in this covenant is a blessing for keeping it. This is what Jesus has fulfilled, bringing us eternal life as opposed to death (Rom. 5:15ff). Our redemption is a total redemption of both body and soul. Therefore, it is not complete until the resurrection of the dead, when our perishable and mortal bodies are raised imperishable and immortal (1 Cor. 15). Adam's sin ushered in death and all its effects not only on humanity, but on all of creation. Likewise, Christ's perfect obedience will redeem not only fallen mankind, but all of His creation (Rev. 21:1, 5; 22:3). It's in glorification that we will fully be God's image bearers. He visited Adam and Eve in the garden, but in the new heaven and earth it is said, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev. 21:3).

For Everyday Life:

The writers of Scripture often put forward our future glorification as the reason for hope in the midst of current suffering. We suffer under the effects of sin and sin itself. Paul encourages us that the suffering of this present time is not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed (Rom. 8:18-25). Peter encourages us to patiently endure suffering, seeing

what appears to be slowness on the part of the Lord as salvation. We see this salvation by anticipating the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:8-13). The entire book of the Revelation is meant to encourage us and strengthen our faith in Christ, in His coming to make all things new. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). These words are indeed sweet, but they would not be nearly as sweet if not coming from our great and glorious God. As a loving father comforts his child, we will be embraced and comforted by our Father in heaven. In His embrace we will finally and truly glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13)

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.



Questions

- How does the garden (man's pre-fall state) now appear lacking in light of glorification?
- As you consider your glorification, how does it impact your view of justification and sanctification?
- Understanding the new earth to be free from sin (Rev. 21:8, 27), what does this tell us about God's law (Ex. 20:1-17; Matt. 22:36-40)?
- In what ways is your hope in eternity attacked? How does this relate to faith?

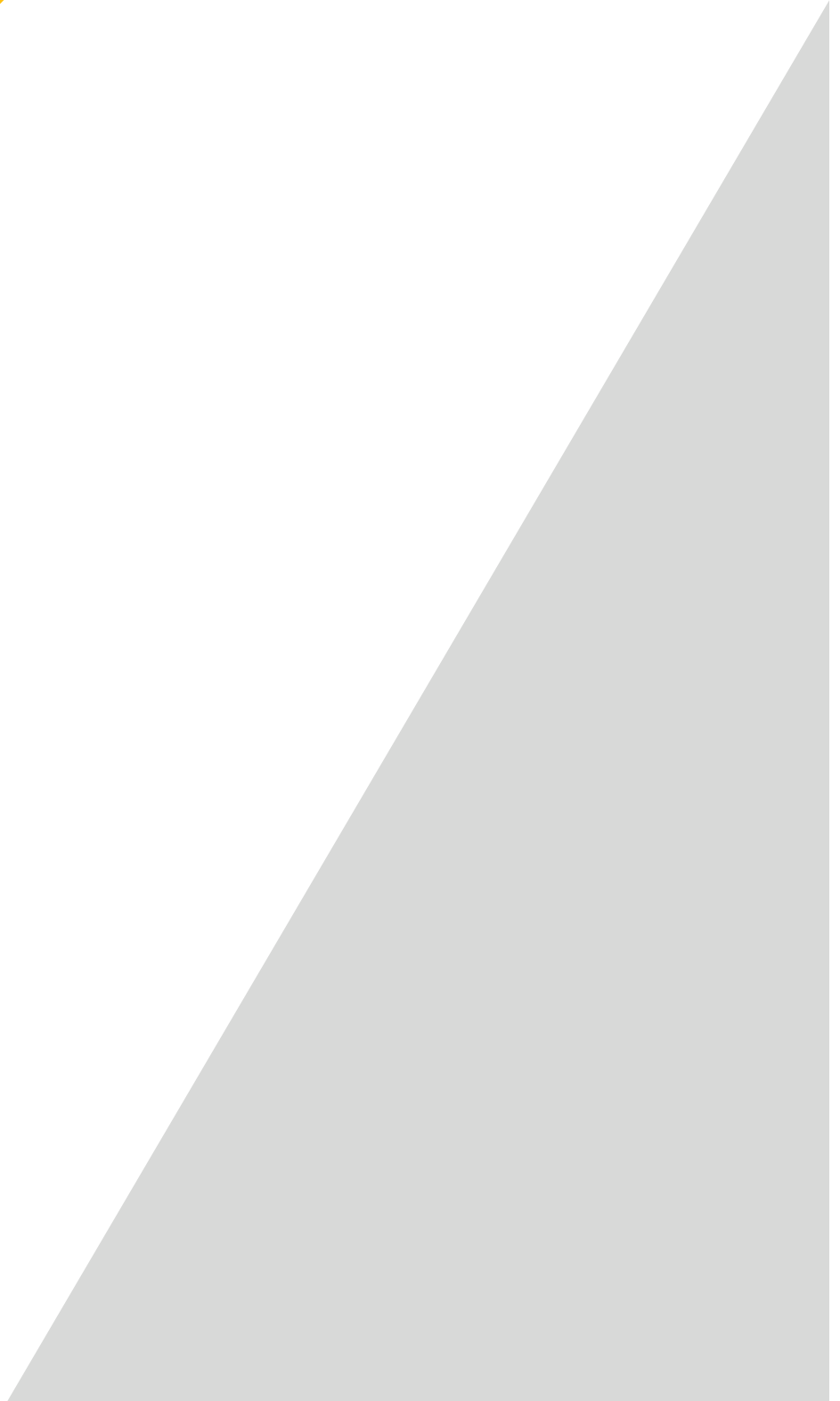


Additional Resources

- *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* - John Murray
 - *In My Place Condemned He Stood* - J.I. Packer
 - *The Cross of Christ* - John Stott
 - *The Holiness of God* - R.C. Sproul
 - *Knowing God* - J.I. Packer
 - *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* - John Owen
 - *The Cross* - Martin Lloyd-Jones
 - *The Whole Christ* - Sinclair Ferguson
 - *Scandalous* - D.A. Carson
 - *Getting the Gospel Right* - R.C. Sproul
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Notes





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