

**Core Seminar**

**Jump Start**

**Class 1: Saved by God**

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*Revised by Daniel Gus Schreiner (April 11, 2010)*

1. consider the main themes of the Christian life (like…see handout) and

2. what it means to live as a Christian.

Follow up to Xty. Explained.

Introductions

***Pray***

main question = “How do I live as a Christian”.

Well, in order to begin to answer that question we need to establish the foundation of what a Christian is.

So what is a Christian?

A Christian is someone who has been saved by God.

We’re going to be using this simple definition of a Christian (as someone saved by God) for three important reasons. Understanding that we’ve been saved by God is…

1. foundational for understanding the Christian life – understanding that we’ve been saved by grace and not by works
2. has huge implications for how we live as Christians and view the world
3. and a proper understanding of grace in salvation should provide us with right motivations and confidence as we live a godly life to His glory

The fact that God saves us from first to last and that it is His initiative may be something you are very familiar with. But just because we’re familiar does not mean we shouldn’t go over them time and time again. By way of analogy, in say professional sports – training and preparing for the big game has become a complex and high-tech deal – advanced scouting reports, watching hours and hours of tape just studying opposing players tendencies, etc. – but what do professional athletes spend the most time doing? Going over the basics. The fundamentals – sound fundamentals win the championship. So the professional baseball players are still doing most of the same routines that they did as little leaguers. Fielding ground balls cleanly, getting their butts down and gloves on the ground, keeping their eye on the ball all the way to the glove making a clean, unrushed, accurate throw to first. I won’t belabor this analogy – but you get the point – in a similar way in our Christian lives – we need to come back to the foundations time and time again.

This morning we want to soak in these truths and really explore God’s grace to us and let these head truths really sink down and wrap around our hearts. I have found it true in my own life that at times that I’m struggling w/ joy, or assurance, or proper motivations, or pride, or whatever, its not usually thinking about some secondary theological issue like baptism – but it’s these foundational, simple truths like that God alone saves us that brings me comfort and gives me hope. I hope you find these 7 studies on the basics of the Christian faith to really grow your affection and faith in our Savior.

So today’s class we hope to look at the foundation for understanding God’s Work in salvation and (1) our condition apart from Christ (2) God’s action and purposes in salvation (3) the implications of understanding #1-#2 will *help us to see us ourselves for who we are* and grow in love for God as we consider His action in saving us and why He saved us.

**So let’s move onto the Point II…**

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 (1) how they lived apart from Christ (2) 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 just look at a couple of these passages to help us understand this truth.

1. read Eph. 2:1-3

*As 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. All 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*

how does Paul describe these Christians before conversion?

* Dead in their transgressions
* Following the spirit of disobedience
* Gratifying the pleasures of our sinful nature
* By our very nature, objects of God’s wrath

Let’s look at a similar text to drive this point home

1. read Titus 3:3

*At 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.*

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.

Let’s just camp out a second here on Paul’s image in Titus 3 that we are a SLAVE to sin apart from Christ. Is that how you saw yourself before you were a Christian? Is that how your non-Christian friends and family see themselves? As slaves to their sin? According to the Bible we’re either a slave to righteousness or to sin.

What does it mean to be a slave to sin?

John Piper writes on a sermon on Rom. 6:

*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 bondage to the allurements of sin.*

Apart from Christ, we are slaves to sin like slaves to a master. It has complete and utter control on us. 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 Eph. 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.

What does it 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 them all up, and the best word you can come up with is DEAD. It means to be these points in the handout. Your will is enslaved, your spiritual mind is blinded and deceived, your heart is cold and dead, your whole disposition is hostile toward God.

This is more than just poetic imagery describing our condition apart from Christ. Sin brings us down to our grave literally. And apart from Christ, we will perish in eternal death, thanks to the sin we were enslaved to and that we followed happily. Sin promises so much but what it leaves at the end of the day is a rotting corpse. But as horrible as that is, we can’t even fathom the second death and burning eternally in the lake of fire.

Why is it important for Christians to understand their state in sin apart from Christ?

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

Which leads us to the second part of our discussion this morning,

**III. Salvation is a work initiated by God, accomplished by God, according to God’s purposes**.

Think about it. Who else could have initiated this miracle? Not us. Remember apart from Christ, we’re the dead, enslaved ones. How does a corpse respond? Remember the story of Lazarus and Jesus? Jesus speaks and Lazarus gets up. Lazarus didn’t meet Jesus halfway. Jesus didn’t give Lazarus instructions on how to help me help you raise yourself from the dead. Jesus spoke and His call was effectual.

Praise God, He doesn’t leave us where we left off in Eph. And Titus. Lets look at the rest of the passage…

Ephesians 2:4-5, **“But** because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.”

*Titus 3:4-5,* “**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.”

In both passages who is responsible for initiating salvation? God.

We weren’t asking for salvation. We weren’t screaming help. We were at war with God….BUT GOD. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones, a famous Welsh preacher who died in 1981, said the following in a sermon just on the phrase “But God”

*“With these two words we come to the introduction to the Christian message, the peculiar, specific message which the Christian faith ahs 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.

Its 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 one level its biblically 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. Remember, dead men don’t talk, walk, or stop sinning. We need God to raise us, not just write us a prescription for our disease so we can follow his steps in the Bible and get cured. We need to be raised from the dead. Now, this doesn’t mean that we wait around passively for God to raise us or that we have no responsibility in these matters. Rather, we are called to respond to God’s voice in repentance and belief. These are Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 1:15) a command to “repent and believe the good news”. Any questions?

Not only is salvation initiated by God but it is carried through to completion by God. And thank goodness too. Right? If it were up to us to hang onto our salvation, I know I would let go.

This brings us to **Point IV** in our outline that **Salvation is carried through to completion by God**.

The first place we want to go when considering that He who saves us also holds onto us is Rom. 8:29-30 in what is often referred to as the golden chain. To Read?

*Romans 8:29-30*, “For those He 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.”

The assertion of Paul’s is that those who are foreknown by God are also glorified. Since God initiates faith he will also bring it to completion. Later in Romans chapter 8, Paul gets after this same idea and further comforts believers that our perseverance does not lie in our own strength but rather in the love of Christ…nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. We see that down in Phil. 1:6 too.

*Phil. 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.”*

Martin Luther*, “man, before he is renewed into the new creation of the Spirit’s kingdom, does and endeavors nothing to prepare himself for that new creation and kingdom, and when he is re-created he does and endeavors nothing towards his perseverance in that kingdom; but the Spirit alone works both blessings in us, regenerating us, and preserving us when regenerate…”*

Summary: God initiates and completes the work of salvation.

So in summary, man apart from Christ is a slave to sin and dead in His sins. But God in His great mercy begins and completes the work of salvation in the life of believer with no assistance, cooperation or anything to us dead enslaved folks. One last question before we dive into practical application. **Why does God save us? What’s His motivation?**

**Point V**

I remember when talking to my good friend Mike who was saved when we were in college. He just said, “Dan I can’t accept that God chooses whom He will save because why would He choose me?” Honestly, that should be our question. What motivates God to save sinners and haters of Him?

Well it certainly isn’t anything attractive about us or anything we can do for Him that He is lacking.

So it isn’t our righteousness (Titus 3:4-5) – you can just look right to your left to see it printed out for you in your handout. Neither is it because of our inherent worthiness or qualities. Lets look at Deut. 7:7-8

*“****7****The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.****8****But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”*

Rather, the reasons why God saves us according to this Deut. Passage and the Titus one is because of His love and mercy so that He might get the glory because of how he treated such undeserved sinners such as us. Thus, fundamentally, the reason God saves us is that He might get the glory, that His name might be praised. We see this in 1 peter 2:9

**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.

And in…

Eph. 1:13-14

**13**And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, **14**who 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 a God-centeredness of salvation. The longer you look at Scripture the more you will see that. We don’t get any pats on the back for believing and repenting and persevering, God gets all the glory.

Secondarily, God saves because He wants to.

2 Tim. 1:9

**9**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.* This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

Eph. 1:4-5

**4**For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5**he[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph.%201:4-5;&version=31;#fen-NIV-29196a#fen-NIV-29196a)] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, *in accordance with his pleasure and will—*

God does what He wants. He has His purposes and we can’t always understand Him. Why did God save you, if you know Him? For His glory and according to His good will.

Again, I’ll summarize this class for you…

* 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 App.**

Q: Why would understanding that we’re saved by God produce humility in us?

A: nothing to boast in. According to Rom. 11:6, if we could boast in anything having to do w/ our salvation, grace would no longer be called grace. I love the words to How Sweet and Awful is the Place.

*1. How sweet and awful is the place  
With Christ within the doors,  
While everlasting love displays  
The choicest of her stores.*

*2. While all our hearts and all our songs  
Join to admire the feast,  
Each of us cry, with thankful tongues,  
“Lord, why was I a guest?”*

*3. “Why was I made to hear Thy voice,  
And enter while there’s room,  
When thousands make a wretched choice,  
And rather starve than come?”*

*4. ‘Twas the same love that spread the feast  
That sweetly drew us in;  
Else we had still refused to taste,  
And perished in our sin*.

Q: How would thinking about these things bring assurance to us?

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 a Christian. But, its 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, its at such times that its 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 not based on our choosing God but God’s choosing us.

Ephesians 1:4, says God chose Christians to be 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 the 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.

And the last application, we’ll consider as we close is that considering these great truths and God’s action in salvation and that we can’t commend ourselves before God will give us proper motivation in serving God. Eph. 2:8-10.

Its clear here that works are not reason for our salvation but rather a reflection of who we are in Christ. This should shift our whole motive for good works because we can’t gain or lose salvation by them rather we are free to love God for who He is and desire to see him glorified in our lives.

There are many other things we could consider. We could drown 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.

**Comments:**

* TML says in April 2010
  + make the response of repentance and belief a little more clear (added some language but feel free to add more).
  + This is always a small class at CHBC so make this more discussion oriented.