

# FOUNDATIONS: What Christians Should Believe

12 October 2011

## *SALVATION: How God Makes Rebels His Children*

### Part 2

**Bible Reading:** Galatians 4:1-7

**Context:** In our ongoing study through our church's confession of faith,<sup>1</sup> we are currently discussing the doctrine of salvation.<sup>2</sup> Thus far we have learned why salvation is an important concept and what it means to be saved. Tonight we will consider the phrase from our doctrinal statement, "We believe that the salvation of sinners is divinely initiated."

*Salvation: We believe that the salvation of sinners is divinely initiated and wholly of grace through the mediatorial offices of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who, by appointment of the Father, voluntarily took upon Himself our nature, yet without sin, and honored the divine law by His obedience, thus qualifying Himself to be our Savior; that by the shedding of His blood in His death He fully satisfied the just demands of a holy and righteous God regarding sin; that His sacrifice consisted not in setting us an example by his death as a martyr, but was a voluntary substitution of Himself in the sinner's place, the Just dying for the unjust, Christ bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; that having risen from the dead He is now enthroned in Heaven; He is in every way qualified to be a suitable, compassionate and all-sufficient Savior. We believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition of salvation. Repentance is a change of mind and purpose toward God prompted by the Holy Spirit and is an integral part of saving faith.*

#### **Discussion:**

- I. Just by way of reminder, how important is the doctrine of salvation? Compared, for example, to end times teaching, how important is salvation?<sup>3</sup>
- II. Oftentimes Christians ask people the question, "Have you been saved?" From what are we saved? Why do we need to be saved?
- III. For the sake of discussion, imagine salvation was not conceived of and executed solely by God but rather something planned out by humans. How would our Christian lives change? Where would some of the glory go for our salvation?

#### **Study:**

- I. What Does it Mean that Salvation is Divinely Initiated?
  - A. To initiate something means to take the first step toward accomplishing something. As it is used in our doctrinal statement, synonyms for initiate might include conceive of, start, create, or originate. To use a human example, if you initiated a phone conversation with me, you would be the one to dial my number and call me.
  - B. When we say that salvation is divinely initiated, what we mean is that salvation was conceived of and executed by God. He is the *Savior*, we are the *saved*. He is the *Redeemer* and we are the *redeemed*. We should not imagine humans climbing the rope of salvation God lowers down from heaven, nor as begging God to send a Savior but as dead in sin and God intervening to resuscitate us. We were not confused sheep trying to find our way home but stiff-necked, wayward sheep whom the Shepherd goes out seeking (cf. Matthew 18:12). Since God designed salvation "so that no one may boast"

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete copy of our church's confession of faith, visit our website ([www.trinitybaptistmuncie.org](http://www.trinitybaptistmuncie.org)) and look under the "We Believe" category. We will attempt to put all the previous notes from this series on the church website in the not too distant future.

<sup>2</sup> If you would like to go deeper in the study of the doctrine of salvation, we recommend the following resources: For an introductory study, see *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); for a more intermediate consideration, consider *The Truth of the Cross* by RC Sproul (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2007); for a challenging yet rewarding study, check out *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* by John Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

<sup>3</sup> For more on how we should evaluate and classify doctrines by level of importance, see the very helpful article by Dr. Albert R. Mohler, Jr., "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity," available at: <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity/>.

(Ephesians 2:8-9), the entire emphasis should be placed on what God does to save the sinner so that He receives all the glory.

## II. In What Ways Did God Initiate Salvation?

### A. God Took the Initiative to Design Our Salvation in Eternity Past (the Father<sup>4</sup>):

1. The various works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit necessary for our salvation were planned out before God created the universe:
  - a. 1 Corinthians 2:7-8 – We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.<sup>5</sup>
  - b. Titus 1:2 – In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began [literally: “before times eternal”] and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted.
  - c. 2 Timothy 1:9 – Who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.
  - d. Revelation 13:8 – All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.<sup>6</sup>
2. The individual lives and salvations of believers were planned out before God created the universe:<sup>7</sup>
  - a. Psalm 139:16 – Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.
  - b. Matthew 25:34 – Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”
  - c. Ephesians 1:3-4 – 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.
  - d. Revelation 17:8 – The dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

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<sup>4</sup> You may notice how the following three ways in which God took/takes the initiative in salvation are organized around the three Persons of the Trinity. That is very much intentional. We should think of our salvation as a work of revelation of the Trinity whereby we are brought into fellowship with the three Persons. A shorthand way to summarize the Trinitarian nature of salvation could be with the three words architect, accomplisher, and applier. The Father is the architect of salvation, designing the entire plan in eternity past; the Son is the accomplisher of salvation, redeeming us with his death and resurrection; the Spirit is the applier of salvation, causing us to be born again and enabling us to enjoy the benefits the Father planned and the Son purchased.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>6</sup> This is actually the King James Version of Revelation 13:8. In my opinion, the KJV translates this verse more accurately than the ESV.

<sup>7</sup> This point brings up the mysterious and often contentious subject of predestination. While it is not the purpose of this lesson to provide a thorough understanding of predestination and we do not have time to pursue the subject here, two thoughts should be kept in mind. First, since God is infinite and we are finite, we should expect the Bible to teach a number of concepts about God that are not entirely comprehensible by humans (e.g., the Trinity, the Virgin birth, the hypostatic union, miracles, etc.). How God is totally sovereign over everything *and* humans are completely responsible for their moral decisions is ultimately a mystery. Second, as Bible-believing Christians we must be committed to happily believing whatever the Bible teaches, even if we do not initially understand or like it. God has told us what He has told us in the Bible for good reasons and when we struggle we should pray for grace to renew our minds to bring them into greater conformity with Scriptural thoughts (Romans 12:1-2). For helpful, balanced introductions to this subject, we recommend *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J.I. Packer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008) and *Southern Baptist Sermons on Sovereignty and Responsibility* by Basil Manly et. al (Harrisonburg: Sprinkle, 2003), both of which are in our church library.

- B. God Took the Initiative to Accomplish Our Salvation in Jesus' Cross and Resurrection (the Son):
1. Jesus was promised throughout the Old Testament:
    - a. Genesis 3:15 – I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.
    - b. Isaiah 7:14 – Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
    - c. For far more biblical evidence on this point, see the Bible study entitled "How were people saved in the Old Testament?" available on our church website.
  2. At the perfect time, Jesus took on flesh, lived the life of obedience we should have lived, and then died on the cross and endured the wrath we deserved:
    - a. Romans 5:6 – For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
    - b. Galatians 4:4-5 – When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.
  3. Of His own initiative, God raised Jesus from the dead, thereby conquering death, sin, and the devil:
    - a. Acts 2:24 – God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.
    - b. Romans 8:34 – 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.
- C. God Took the Initiative to Apply Our Salvation by the Holy Spirit in the Lives of Individual Believers (the Spirit):
1. God took the initiative to cause us to be born again:
    - a. Ephesians 2:4-6 – God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.
    - b. 1 Peter 1:3 – 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.
  2. God took the initiative to justify<sup>8</sup> us when we believed:
    - a. Romans 8:33 – Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.
    - b. Romans 5:1 – Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
  3. God takes the initiative to keep us in the faith, to increasingly conform us to the image of Christ, and to preserve us until the Day of Redemption:
    - a. Romans 8:29-30 – For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

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<sup>8</sup> We will discuss the incredible concept of justification at greater length in a future lesson, Lord willing.

- b. Ephesians 1:13 – 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.
- c. Ephesians 4:30 – Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- d. Philippians 1:6 – I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
- e. Jude 1:24-25 – Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

### III. Some Practical Implications:

- A. Since salvation is divinely initiated, we should give God all praise and thanksgiving for saving us. We were those wandering sheep whom Jesus sought out to save. We were those dead in sin whom God resuscitated. We were those on eternal death-row whom God graciously pardoned. Had God not taken the initiative to save us, none would be saved today. Focus your minds on this truth during your prayer times and be filled with gratitude.
- B. Since salvation is divinely initiated, we should not look at salvation as a cooperative effort. It is not as we share salvation 50%/50% or even 75%/25%, but as Jonah 2:9 says, "Salvation belongs to the LORD!" Therefore all boasting is excluded (Romans 3:27) and worship is energized. Think on this truth and sing out with joy in corporate worship.
- C. Since salvation is divinely initiated, we should never look at Jesus' death and resurrection as some sort of "plan B" God had to turn to after we had messed everything up. Jesus is the "lamb slain from before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 17:8)! As odd as it may sound, God knew Adam and Eve would sin from all eternity past but allowed it to happen so that Jesus could then be born, die, and rise again, thereby be declared the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and in so doing, God would receive greater glory for our salvation.
- D. Since salvation is divinely initiated, we should never worry that we may lose our salvation. Our names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life from all eternity past (Revelation 17:8)! God will preserve us until the Day of Redemption (Ephesians 4:30). We should live with confidence and joy that we are just as secure in God's love now as if we were in heaven already. As Augustus Toplady's hymn *A Debtor to Mercy* puts it, "More happy but not more secure, the glorified spirits in heaven."
- E. Since salvation is divinely initiated, we should have comfort regarding the future. Though the world is growing worse and worse and though civilization appears to be spinning out of control, God is still working out the perfect plan He designed in eternity past (Romans 8:28). While we may grieve the sin and destruction around us we should not grieve as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We are those with a certain hope and future (Jeremiah 29:11).

### Application:

- I. In what ways has this lesson enabled you to appreciate your salvation more than you did before? Has it moved your heart to worship God for what He did to save you?
- II. Are you confident that God has saved you forever? Do you know when this happened in your life? Did you do anything that resulted in God saving you? Did you do anything to deserve salvation?
- III. If you are not sure that God has saved you fully and for all time, is there something you need to do before that can happen? What would persuade you that God has certainly saved you?
- IV. What point from tonight's lesson most stood out to you and why?