

FOUNDATIONS: What Christians Should Believe

18 January 2011

SALVATION: How God Makes Rebels His Children

Part 4

Context: In our ongoing study through our church's confession of faith,¹ we are currently discussing the doctrine of salvation.² Thus far we have learned why salvation is an important concept, what it means to be saved, how salvation is divinely initiated, and how salvation is wholly of grace. Tonight we will consider the phrase from our doctrinal statement, "We believe that the salvation of sinners is...through the mediatorial offices of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

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.*

Review:

- I. Just by way of review, Christians often ask people the question, "Have you been saved?" From what are we saved? Why do we need to be saved?
- II. How is salvation divinely initiated? What did the Father initiate? The Son? The Spirit?
- III. In what way is salvation wholly of grace? Why must salvation be wholly of grace? How can a righteous God give saving grace to His enemies? How should we reflect God's grace to others?

Bible Reading: Hebrews 4:14-5:10

Study:

"We believe that the salvation of sinners is...through the mediatorial offices of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

- I. Who is "Jesus Christ, the Son of God"?
 - A. We studied the identity of "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" a few years ago in our series through our church doctrinal statement. Article #4 is devoted to Jesus Christ.³ For the scriptural teaching regarding Jesus' person, we refer you to the notes from that set of studies.
 - B. Concisely, this Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, the one whose earthly life the four Gospels accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) record, the one who died on a cross and was raised back to life after three days, the one who ascended into heaven and is currently reigning at God's right hand, and the one who will one day return to earth to judge the living and the dead.

¹ For a complete copy of our church's confession of faith, visit our website (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.

² 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).

³ Here is article 4 in full: "**Jesus Christ:** We believe that Jesus Christ is the second person of the Godhead, equal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit and of the same nature. We believe that He was active in the creation and that by Him all things consist. We believe that, as to His earthly ministry, He was begotten of the Holy Spirit in a miraculous manner, born of Mary, a virgin, as no other man has been born or can be born of woman, and that He is both true God and true man."

C. As our statement of faith indicates, the mediatorial work of this Jesus is instrumental in our salvation.

II. What Does it Mean that Jesus is a Mediator?

A. On a few occasions, the Bible describes Jesus functioning as a mediator:

1. 1 Timothy 2:5– For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.⁴
2. Hebrews 12:24–...and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

B. A mediator is a go-between. He or she is an objective third party who works to reconcile two alienated parties. Synonyms for mediator would include words such as “intermediary”, “arbitrator”, “negotiator”, “moderator”, or “referee”. Theologian A.A. Hodge provides this helpful definition of mediator:

“A mediator is one who intervenes between contesting parties for the sake of making reconciliation. The term is sometimes applied to independent and disinterested parties called to arbitrate a difficulty; sometimes to a dependent messenger or agent of one of the parties to the contest employed to carry overtures to the other party. In this sense Moses was a mediator between God and the people of Israel (Deut. 5:5; Gal. 3:19). Sometimes it is applied to an intercessor employed by the weaker party to influence the stronger.”⁵

C. Why would a mediator between God and people be necessary?

1. As we have learned, God in His glorious holiness cannot tolerate any shadow of sin (Habakkuk 1:13). Humans, on the other hand, are desperately sinful and willful rebels against God (Romans 3:10ff.). J.I. Packer aptly summarizes the situation when he writes, “Men are opposed to God in their sin, and God is opposed to men in his holiness.”⁶ Without some sort of mediator, the salvation of sinners would be completely impossible (Mark 10:27).
2. At this point, pause and remind yourself that God was not under any obligation to provide a mediator. God would have been completely righteous had He left us to perish in our sins (as He did with the fallen angels). If God were to provide a mediator, it would be wholly an act of undeserved, sovereign grace.

D. The Old Testament Hope of a Mediator:

1. Interestingly, Old Testament saints, though their understanding of the Gospel was far more elementary than ours is today, comprehended enough about God’s holiness and human sinfulness to appreciate that a mediator would be necessary if humans and God were to enter into a saving relationship. Consider the following two examples:
 - a. Exodus 20:18-21 – Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.
 - b. Job 9:3, 32-35 – How can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times...For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. Would that there were an arbiter

⁴Scripture 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.

⁵*The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958 [orig. 1869]), 134.

⁶Cited in *Living the Cross Centered Life* by C.J. Mahaney (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), 59.

between us, who might lay his hand on us both.⁷ Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me. Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself.

2. Who is the fulfillment of this Old Testament hope? Who is this one mediator between God in His holiness and men in our sin?

1 Timothy 2:5– For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

E. How Jesus is Uniquely Qualified to be our Mediator:

1. The above discussion prompts the question, “What kind of third party could reconcile man in his sin and God in His holiness?”
 - a. Since a mediator is a third party bringing two alienated parties together, our mediator must have some sort of already-established relationship with God from which he can work reconciliation.
 - b. Furthermore, if mediation is to happen, it stands to reason that the mediator cannot be a sinner like us, since he would need mediation himself.
 - c. Moreover, since our sin is of infinite evil in the sight of God, this mediator must have something of infinite value whereby he can atone for the infinite debt of our sin.⁸
2. Logic would seem to demand a very particular mediator, one who is sinless, who is uniquely related to God, and of infinite value. No human being, however great or impressive, could ever be such a mediator. Neither could an angel or any other created being.
3. The Bible teaches that Jesus and Jesus alone could be our mediator. He fulfills the necessary requirements like no other individual ever could:
 - a. Since Jesus is the eternal Son of God (Hebrews 1:5), He has a unique relationship with God the Father from which He can accomplish mediation.
 - b. Since Jesus is sinless (including His humanity [Hebrews 4:15]), He does not need mediation for Himself but can mediate for others.
 - c. Since the blood of Jesus, the God-man, is infinitely valuable (1 Peter 1:19), His blood can atone for the infinitely evil sins of humanity.
4. Consider the following two quotes regarding Jesus’ mediatorial work:
 - a. “If Christ the redeemer had been only God he would not have died, since God by his very nature cannot die. It was only as a man that Christ could represent humanity and die as a man...As God, however, Christ’s death had infinite value sufficient to supply redemption for the sins of all mankind. Clearly then Christ had to be both God⁹ and man to secure man’s salvation.”¹⁰
 - b. “Because of God’s amazingly gracious heart toward those who thoroughly deserve only His wrath, He both planned for and provided this mediator to resolve the divine dilemma—a mediator who, through His blood, would accomplish a unique assignment utterly unlike any

⁷See marginal reading.

⁸This question was the subject of Anselm’s (1033 –1109) great work *Cur Deus Homo* [Latin for “Why Did God Become Man?”]. Anselm famously said, “The debt was so great, that while man alone owed it, only God would pay it.” This understanding of sin and debt naturally leads to the concept of substitutionary atonement, that Jesus literally paid our debt of sin on the cross in our place when He died. We’ll devote more attention to this subject in a future lesson.

⁹Jesus’ mediatorial work reminds us of the absolute necessity of defending Jesus’ deity against the claims of Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses who deny that Jesus is fully God. If Jesus is not fully God, He cannot be our mediator and we remain dead in our sins. Jesus’ deity is only important if you believe that eternal salvation from the infinite wrath of God is important.

¹⁰ Cited, *Cross Centered Life*, 72.

other work of mediation. In the mystery of His mercy, God—the innocent, offended party—offers up His own Son to death, to satisfy His righteous wrath and save the guilty party from it.¹¹

III. A Few Applications of Jesus' Mediatorial Work:

- A. Because Jesus is our mediator, we have total and permanent peace with God (Romans 5:1; 8:1). This peace is in no way contingent upon our merit, wisdom, performance, or even the quality of our faith. Our salvation was accomplished for us by an external third party. Let us praise God for such a complete salvation!
- B. Because Jesus is our mediator, we can know with full assurance that we are saved *now* (1 John 5:13). The second we transition our faith from ourselves to Jesus as our mediator, that instant we are reconciled to God. We need not live in constant doubt or fear regarding our souls. Trust in the mediator God has provided and know that you have eternal life!
- C. Since no one could be our mediator except for Jesus, let us praise God for His unfathomable wisdom (Romans 11:33ff.). God resolved a dilemma that was far too serious and profound for us to ever resolve. Only the mind of God could conceive of something as amazing as the Gospel of God's grace!
- D. Since no one could be our mediator except for Jesus, let us praise God for His priceless grace (Ephesians 1:3ff.). God did not need to provide us with such a mediator. He would have been just if He had not. But since God is loving and gracious, He provided us with exactly the mediator we need, and that at the cost of the life of His own dear Son.

IV. What are Jesus' Mediatorial *Offices*?

- A. You may have noticed that our confession of faith states that Jesus fulfilled multiple mediatorial *offices* (emphasis on the plural). What might these refer to?
- B. Lord willing, in our next lesson we will consider Jesus' three mediatorial offices, His roles as Prophet, Priest, and King.

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. Can you think of additional practical applications of Jesus' mediatorial work to your life?
- III. Evangelical Christians claim that people are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Why then does this not lead to immorality and licentiousness? If I am not motivated to obey out of fear or hell, what other motivation(s) exist for obedience?
- IV. What point from tonight's lesson most stood out to you and why?

¹¹Ibid.,70.