

Session 5: Man, Salvation, and the Purpose of God's Grace

Man

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

Point 1: Man is created in God's image

John 4:24 tells us that God is Spirit. When we say that man was created in God's image, we are referring to God's spiritual image. Man was endowed with a rational, emotional, and moral nature—just like God.

Human beings have the unique capability of mirroring the qualities of God. No other creature can express rational, emotional, and moral will other than man.

Our sin marred the image of God in us. Jesus Christ is the perfect reflection of God's image. It is through Him that the image of God is restored in us.

Creation "in God's image" also refers to the fact that man was given dominion over the lower orders of creation, just as God has dominion.

Point 2: Man sins of his own free will

In the Garden of Eden, man was given free will to either choose righteousness or sinfulness. He chose sinfulness.

Some will argue that "man is basically good." This is not Scriptural. If man were basically good and innocent, we would expect at least a percentage of them to remain good and sinless (Sproul, p.145). Every man sins. Sin is universal.

Paul puts it this way in Romans:

Romans 3:9-12

9 Well then, are we Jews better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin.

10 As the Scriptures say, “No one is good—not even one.

11 No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God.

12 All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one.”

Adam and Eve’s sin created a sinful nature in humankind. We are not sinners because we sin—we sin because we are sinners.

Point 3: Man is sinful from birth

Romans 5:12

12 When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

Psalms 51:5

5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

The result of Adam and Eve’s sin is known as “original sin”. It is the concept that we are all sinful from birth. Original sin passes to a child through the father; since Jesus had no earthly father, he was born without original sin.

The rest of us, however, are sinful from the day we are conceived. We inherit two things from the original sin of Adam:

- A sinful nature

It is in our nature to be sinful. We can see this even in small children, who disobey their parents and fight over toys. We do not become sinners at some point in our lives; we are sinful from the beginning.

- A sinful environment

Since we live in a world with other sinners, we are in “an environment inclined toward sin.” Even though we may surround ourselves with good people, they are still sinners. Satan rules our environment—this world. It is filled with temptations.

Point 4: Man's worth is expressed through creation in God's image and Christ's sacrifice

There is nothing redeeming in us. Nothing about us is worthy of any relationship with God. God cannot stand sin. We are sin.

So where does our worth come from? God's love for us. God's love for us is expressed in two ways:

- God created us in His image

God loved us enough to make us like Him. We are not like the animals. We were imbued with rational thought, an emotional capacity, and a moral nature. It is because of these faculties that we are able to have a relationship with God.

- Christ died for us

God so desires to have a relationship with us that He sent His son as a sacrifice for our sins. Only through Christ—in whom there was no sin—could man be restored to God.

The last statement in this section is important:

"...therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love."

Racism has lived in the church for years. God has no tolerance for racism.

Matthew 28:19

19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Romans 1:16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is for all men—black and white, Jew and Gentile, male and female. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was made for all men.

Salvation

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.

B. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.

C. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

D. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

God's Purpose of Grace

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.



Why do we need to be saved?

- Man is sinful from birth.

Romans 3:23

23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

- The penalty for sin is death—not only physical death, but spiritual death:

Romans 6:23

23 For the wages of sin is death,

- Spiritual death involves eternal punishment

Revelation 20:14-15

14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Luke 16:23-24

23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

Point 1: Salvation begins by a profession in the belief of Christ as Savior and repentance of sin.

We believe that the first step to salvation is the profession of Jesus Christ as Risen Lord. Jesus teaches this very clearly:

Matthew 10:32-33

32 “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

Paul reinforces it in Romans:

Romans 10:9

9 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

The second step is to repent of the sins that you have committed. “Repent” literally means to “think differently.” We often use the definition “turn away.” It is important to note that you must not only turn away from your sin, but you must turn to God.

Another important point: God does not expect us to change before we come to Him. But He expects that we want to change.

What does God have to say about repentance?

Ezekiel 18:30-32

30 “Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall.

31 Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?

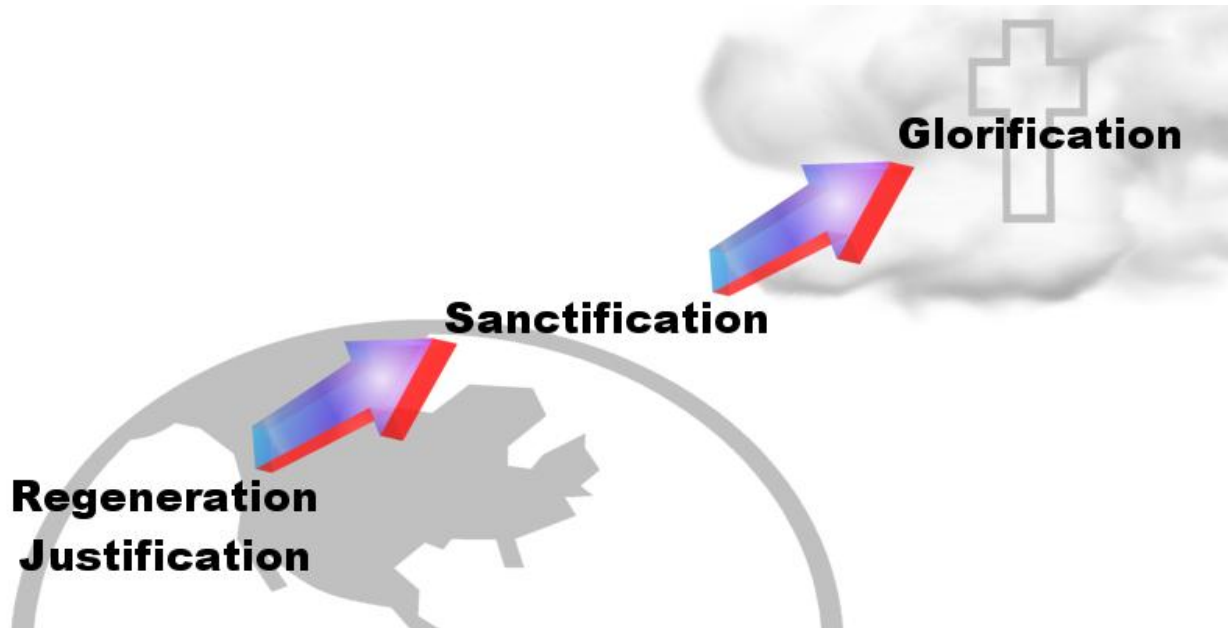
32 For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

2 Chronicles 7:14

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Baptists believe that the only means to salvation is faith. It is not necessary to do anything else other than what has been outlined above. Some religions and some denominations preach that you must have faith and works, or faith and something else.

Baptists believe that our faith is what assures our salvation, while works display that salvation for an unbelieving world.



Point 2: The first stage of salvation is regeneration.

Regeneration

Conviction ➡ **Repentance** ➡ **Faith** ➡ **Confession**

To be regenerated means to be reborn. When we accept Christ as our Savior and turn from our sin to Him, immediately we become a new creature:

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

We often speak of being “born again Christians”—this is what we mean by “born again.” Jesus himself said that in order to see the Kingdom of God, one must be “born again” (John 3:3).

Point 3: Concurrent with regeneration is justification.

At the same time that we are regenerated, we are justified. We often say that being “justified” is like saying “just as if I’d never sinned.” (Read it aloud, it makes sense.) Justification is the act in which unjust and unholy sinners are declared just and righteous by God.

How are we justified before God? Baptists believe that we are justified by our faith alone. No amount of good deeds or works will make us holy—it is only faith in the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we are made holy. Protestants are different than Catholics in this respect—Catholics believe that faith is necessary for justification, but works are an essential part as well.

James says that faith without works is dead:

James 2:14-17

14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

16 If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But Paul seems to have a different opinion:

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

This is an apparent contradiction—James suggests that we need faith and works, while Paul says that works have nothing to do with salvation.

The resolution is this: It is impossible to accept Christ as Savior, but not Lord. When Christ saves us, regeneration and justification are performed. That must be followed by Christ’s lordship, which brings fruit (deeds, works) in the life of a Christian.

A tree that bears no fruit is considered to be dead. A Christian who bears no fruit is dead as well.

R.C. Sproul puts it this way: “If there is justification, sanctification will inevitably follow. If sanctification does not follow, it is certain that justification was not really present.” (Sproul, 191)

So what is sanctification?

Point 4: We are continually being made more like God—this is sanctification.



When we become a Christian, we immediately begin the process of sanctification—being made more like God.

2 Peter 3:8

8 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We should be in a continual state of growth. Our salvation isn't merely a fire insurance policy. God expects us to grow from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity.

Question: Can you lose your salvation?

As Baptists, we do not believe that one can lose their salvation. You'll often hear this referred to as "once saved, always saved." Jesus himself had this to say:

John 10:28

28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

To have a genuine salvation experience, one must accept Christ as Lord. To accept Christ as Lord, there must be a change in the new Christian's life and that new Christian must bear fruit.

The "once saved, always saved" doctrine can also be referred to as the "perseverance of the saints". This can be stated as follows: "If you have saving faith, you will never lose it, and if you lose it, you never had it." (Sproul, 197)

John seems to confirm this:

1 John 2:19

19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

Those who had left John and his ministry never had saving faith—otherwise, they would have continued with John.

This is a tricky doctrine, but the important point is this: You did not gain your salvation by works and you cannot lose it by works. God has the power to hold on to us even when we do not hold onto Him.

Point 5: Salvation has its completion when we arrive in heaven—this is glorification.

Salvation and sanctification have their completion when the believer reaches heaven, either by death or the second coming of Christ. When we arrive in heaven, we will be glorified.

What is Predestination?

R.C. Sproul defines predestination like this: “What predestination means, in its most elementary form, is that our final destination, heaven or hell, is decided by God not only before we get there, but before we are even born.”

The Bible clearly teaches the doctrine of predestination:

Romans 8:29-30

29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Ephesians 1:3-5

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

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 predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...

2 Thessalonians 2:13

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

There are two schools of thought regarding predestination:

- The non-Reformed view is that God chooses those people for salvation that he knows will choose Him. In other words, God's choice is based on His foreknowledge. This still allows for the free will of man to make the final decision on whether he chooses God or not.
- The Reformed view, however, suggests that the final decision on who is saved and who is not rests with God. God elects a certain group of people to be saved and, therefore, a certain group who will not be saved.

As Baptists, we do not require that a believer hold to one or the other. We also do not believe that it is so critical an issue that it would impede fellowship.

The problem with the Reformed view is this: God does not choose to save everyone. This seems unfair, but it is not. Those whom God chooses to save receive His mercy. Those whom He does not choose to save receive justice. God is unjust with no one.

The non-Reformed view has some problems, too. Because man is inherently evil and sinful, though, we often use our free will to decide against the things of God. Most theologians believe that the sin of Adam and Eve completely removed man's desire for God.

So if we have no capacity to desire God on our own, how does one ever become saved? It is through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works not only to convict of sin, but to allow the human heart to understand the things of God. When one becomes saved, the Holy Spirit puts into that person the desire for God.

Without the work of the Holy Spirit, then, no man would choose God. Which brings us back to the predestination question: does God choose to use the Holy Spirit in the lives of all men? Or does he elect some that will receive salvation and others who will not?

The Bible clearly teaches predestination. How you choose to interpret predestination is a personal choice. It is a subject which has sparked debate in the church for hundreds of years.

Words You Need to Know

doctrine	A system of belief or a statement of beliefs. The doctrine of predestination is the set of beliefs that group has regarding predestination.
election	Selection; when we speak of God's election, we speak of God selecting certain people for salvation.
faith	Belief and trust, but not simply a rational belief. It involves heart-belief as well.
glorification	Receiving God's glory in heaven.
justification	Being declared holy and righteous by God.
predestination	The doctrine that God knows before we are even born whether we will be saved or not.
profession	A statement of belief; we speak of a "profession of Christ." This means stating your belief in Christ publicly.
regeneration	Rebirth.
salvation	Being saved from an eternal hell by God's grace and mercy.
sanctification	Continually growing more like God.
works	Deeds, actions. We are not saved by our works, but our works demonstrate Christ in us.

Bibliography

Sproul, R.C., Essential Truths of the Christian Faith. Tyndale House Publishing, Wheaton Illinois, 1992.