



Core Seminar Systematic Theology II Session 20: Plan of Redemption (pt. 2)

PRAYER

WELCOME & PRAYER – *“Lord, we praise you for the grace to consider the unsearchable riches of Christ. Help us to cherish Him above all.”*

I. Introduction

Last week we began looking at God’s glorious plan of redemption. If you’re a believer in Jesus, it should delight your heart to study God’s saving plan and purposes because it’s the story of how God saved you.

We began walking through what theologians often refer to as the order of salvation that helps us understand how God applies redemption to believers. You can find that order on your handouts.

Last week we considered the first 3 stages – election, the gospel call, and regeneration. This morning we will pick up with conversion, then look at union with Christ, and then close with the doctrine of justification.

II. Conversion (Faith & Repentance)

First, let’s take a look at conversion. Let me start our discussion about conversion by reading our church’s statement of faith as it concerns the matter of conversion, in Article 8, entitled “Of Repentance and Faith”:

Article VIII, **Of Repentance and Faith**, CHBC Statement of Faith

We believe that Repentance and Faith are sacred duties, and also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God; whereby being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger and helplessness, and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest and King, and relying on Him alone as the only and all sufficient Savior.

As the Statement of Faith explains, **Conversion is “our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for our personal salvation.”** It’s in this step that regeneration gives us the ability to perform, by renewing our mind and will.

Conversion consists of repentance *and* faith. So when you're sharing the gospel, a helpful summary is GOD-MAN-CHRIST-**RESPONSE**; when we look at conversion, we're thinking of our need to respond – to respond in faith and repentance. Let's look at each aspect separately.

Repentance

First, repentance.

Jesus' first words to us in the Gospel of Mark are a call to repentance and faith.

Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Paul's final words to the Ephesian elders summarize the gospel he preached to them: **Acts 20:20–21** **"I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."**

What is repentance? *Repentance involves a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ*¹.

In the book of Zechariah, God speaks through the prophet Zechariah to his people. A people who had disobeyed him time and time again. A people who lived heinously in their sin and worshiped other gods. Lives of sin and rebellion that had destroyed God's relationship with His people.

What was God's message to his people through the prophet Zechariah? Chapter 1, verse 3: **"Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you."**

God was calling the Israelites to repentance. He was doing it for many reasons, but chief amongst those was for the purpose of restoration of his relationship with His people. As such, repentance, it must be said, concerns the repair of a relationship with God that has been disrupted by human sin.²

As Mark Boda puts it, Repentance "is fundamentally a return to intimate fellowship with the triune God, our Creator and redeemer." It is a relational return which "arises from the human heart and impacts attitudes, words and actions."³

It is not just about the sorrow of offending a holy God. It's not even just about honoring Him in the way that you live, as important as that is. Fundamentally, repentance is the restoration of a broken relationship with God because of sin, the remedying of which can only be had through the act of repentance.

¹ Acts 11:18, Acts 2:37, Joel 2:13, Psalm 119:59

² Boda, Mark J. *Return to Me: A Biblical Theology of Repentance* (New Studies in Biblical Theology).

³ Id.

And, to that end, it must be understood that repentance is NOT mere confession of sin. Do not be fooled by the culture's misuse of this term. Confession is not repentance. Confession is the first *step* to repentance, but it is *not* repentance.

Repentance requires a full *turning* from sin and pursuit of another way of life ... Because if the purpose of repentance is to restore a broken relationship with God, we must understand that He will **NOT** be mocked. We cannot say to Him that we are sorry and continue on in our sin ... No, true repentance is confessing that sin, yes, but then turning from that sin and falling headfirst into the lap of Jesus for the salvation of our soul.

Taking this down a notch, imagine you and your friends are headed from DC to New York. You get in the car and soon see signs for Richmond, VA; then Charlotte, NC. What do you say to the driver? *You're going the wrong way!* The driver says, *I'm sorry, yes, you're right! We should be going North, I feel so bad to have made us late.* So you get back on the road, and soon you see signs for Charleston, SC; and Savannah, GA. Has the driver repented? No! He may be sorry, but repentance is more than that – it's making a U-Turn and going the other direction.

The word “repent” actually got its usage and meaning from the battlefield ...
(illustration/explanation)

Repentance **isn't** a one-time thing. It's a life-long thing. As believers, we run the race of repentance our entire lives. True faith and repentance begin to occur at one point in our lives, but they're not only for that one point. Faith and repentance will mark the true Christian throughout their lives, as God carries his work to completion.

God uses not only the conviction of our badness to see this, but also the realization of His goodness - our apprehension of God's mercy towards us breaks our hearts and leads us to repent.

Take a look at what God says in **Joel 2:12-13**, which you can find on Page 2 of your handouts ...
“‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’¹³ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”

Paul asks the reader in **Romans 2:4**, **“Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”**

This idea of the importance and role of recognizing God's goodness in the process of repentance is illustrated in **Luke 15** – The prodigal had been living in rebellion and sin. Then we're told in v17 that he came to his senses...and returns home hopeful that his father will at least allow him back as a servant. He no doubt had a wrong view of his father when he asked for an early inheritance to gain his 'freedom' from him years earlier. But now, he confesses that his father is a generous man and that service at home is far better than 'freedom' in the far country...If the boy had thought only about himself—his hunger, his homesickness, his loneliness—he would

have despaired. But his painful circumstances helped him to see his father in a new way, and this brought him hope.⁴ This brought true repentance!

J.I. Packer puts it this way: “The repentance that Christ requires of His people consists in a settled refusal to set any limits to the claims which He may make on their lives.”⁵ True repentance is saying, “Ok, God, whatever it takes, I am surrendering everything over to you and will follow you with absolute abandon ... no matter the cost ... no matter the sin ... no matter the struggle. That is true repentance.

Friends, I pray if there are any of you here today who are living in unrepentant sin—not unconfessed sin, but unrepentant sin—that you would turn from your sin today for the salvation of your soul.

Faith

That said, and having looked at repentance, let’s now look at and define what we mean by “saving faith.”

Ephesians 2:8-10 says **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. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

What is faith in Jesus Christ? First, faith **must include knowledge of Christ** and what He’s done in the gospel. We must have some basic knowledge and understanding about the facts surrounding Jesus Christ. We can’t have faith in something or someone we don’t know, don’t have a relationship with, or don’t understand.

Romans 10:14 says **How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?**

We must know about Jesus Christ if we are to believe in Him. That is why it is so imperative that we share the gospel with others. How will they know about salvation if they don’t hear? They won’t! Saving faith comes only through knowing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

But someone might say, “Yeah but don’t even the demons “*know*” about Jesus Christ ... don’t they have this “knowledge” you speak about... and yet they aren’t saved?!” And that person would be correct. **James 2:19** says **“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder.”**

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 235). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1961/2008), 81.

Hence, saving faith must also include trust. We don't just know about Him, we entrust ourselves to Him. We receive Him. We rest on Him. We cast ourselves on Him. **Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace (Ephesians 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29), whereby we receive (John 1:12) and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel.**

Illustration: Burning building

Illustration: Bomb in the building

It's important here to highlight that it's not the strength of our faith that saves but rather it's the *object* of our faith that saves. **Jesus Christ is the object of our faith. He saves us.** You may be holding on by a thread, but it's not the strength of your grip that saves you, but rather *who* you're trusting *in* that does. And, as you learn and understand that it isn't the *strength* of your faith but the *person*, you will quickly find that it's not *you* who are holding on to Christ but, rather, that is *He* who is holding onto you (John 10:28).

I love the way our Statement of Faith puts it: *"heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest and King, and relying on Him alone as the only and all sufficient Savior."*

John Murray puts it this way: faith is a "transference of reliance upon ourselves and all human resources to reliance upon Christ alone for salvation. It is a receiving and resting upon Him...Faith is trust in a person, the person of Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the lost. It is entrustment of ourselves to Him. It is not simply believing Him; it is believing in Him and on Him."⁶

Illus: The chair you're sitting in.

How should we think about faith in the process of salvation? Horatius Bonar put it this way:

"Faith is not Christ, nor the cross of Christ. Faith is always the beggar's outstretched hand, never the rich man's gold; Faith is the window that lets in the light, it's never the sun.

Without worthiness in itself, it knits us to the infinite worthiness of Him in whom the Father delights; and so knitting us, presents us perfect in the perfection of another.

Though it is not the foundation laid in Zion, it brings us to that foundation, and keeps us there, grounded and settled, that we may not be moved away from the hope of the gospel.

*Though it is not the gospel, the glad tidings, it receives these good news as God's eternal truths, and bids the soul rejoice in them; though it is not the burnt-offering, it stands still and gazes on the ascending flame, which assures us that the wrath which should have consumed the sinner has fallen upon the Substitute."*⁷

Because I want to allow time for application this morning, I'm going to ask that any of you who may have questions about what I speak about today to ...

⁶ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 111-12.

⁷ --Horatius Bonar, [*The Everlasting Righteousness; or, How Shall a Man be Just with God?*](#) (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1874/1993), 111-113.

Questions - In what ways is a proper understanding of conversion essential or even helpful to our understanding of our salvation. (2) In what ways is a proper understanding of conversion essential to the proper proclamation of the gospel and to our evangelism?

III. Union With Christ

Having spoken about saving faith, we must now understand that Saving Faith unites us to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. To be saved is to be united to the Savior—the fifth step of the Order of Salvation.

Being united to Christ means that believers are personally joined to the living, incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and reigning Jesus by His Holy Spirit through faith. God-given, Spirit-wrought faith unites us to Jesus Christ in whom we have every spiritual blessing for life and eternity.

So in **Ephesians 1:3**, Paul writes, **“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.”** In fact, let’s turn to Ephesians 1:3-14 together. I want you to notice all the references to union with Christ as we read this together. *[note all the references to union with Christ.]*

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, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 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, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 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, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

There are a bunch of biblical Images that illustrate this Union with Christ:

Union with Christ is likened to that of a building and its cornerstone (Eph. 2:20–22), a vine and its branches (John 15:1–8), the members of a human body and its head (Eph. 1:22–23; 1 Cor. 12:12), and the union between husband and wife (Eph. 5:31–32; 2 Cor. 11:2).

All the benefits of salvation flow to us by virtue of our being united to the Savior.

Believers are justified in Christ, sanctified in Christ, adopted in Christ, preserved in Christ, and glorified in Christ! We possess eternal life in Christ (Rom. 6:23); we are justified in Christ (Rom 8:1); glorified in Christ (Rom. 8:30; 2 Cor. 3:18); sanctified in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2); called in Christ (v. 9); made alive in Christ (15:22; Eph. 2:5); created anew in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17); adopted as children of God in Christ (Gal. 3:26); elected in Christ (Eph. 1:4); and raised with Christ (Col. 3:1).

If Paul wants to refer to a Christian, his short-hand way of doing that is saying that a person is “in Christ” or “in the Lord,” (cf. Rom. 16:1–13; Phil. 4:21; Col. 1:2). Outside of Christ, God is terrible. Inside of Christ, God is wonderful.

John Murray says about the union of Christ: “Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.”⁸

Christ is an infinite treasure trove of grace. We’re going to spend the rest of our time this morning marveling at the wondrous benefits that come to believers by virtue of our union with Him⁹. But before we do, let me ask you a couple of questions ...

Questions - (1) In what ways is a proper understanding of our Union with Christ essential or even helpful to our understanding or assurance of our salvation. (2) In what ways is a proper understanding of the Christian’s union with Christ essential to the proper proclamation of the gospel and to our evangelism and discipleship?

IV. Justification

⁸ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 161.

⁹ Col. 2:20-3:4, John 17:24-26

To that end, let's take a look at the doctrine of justification—the 6th step in the Order of Salvation. To do that, let me read what our Statement of Faith says about the doctrine—it can be found on Page 3 of your handouts:

Article V, Of Justification, CHBC Statement of Faith We believe that the great Gospel blessing which Christ secures to such as believe in Him is Justification; that Justification includes the pardon of sin, and the promise of eternal life on principles of righteousness; that it is bestowed, not in consideration of any works of righteousness which we have done, but solely through faith in the Redeemer's blood; by virtue of which faith His perfect righteousness is freely imputed to us of God; that it brings us into a state of most blessed peace and favor with God, and secures every other blessing needful for time and eternity.

Justification is that saving blessing by which sinners are declared righteous in God's sight through the forgiveness of our sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. This legal declaration of God comes about precisely as we are brought to share in the righteous life, the sin-bearing death, and the triumphant resurrection of Jesus.

Justification is a legal or judicial declaration by God that we are righteous in His sight ... not because of our works but because He imputes or credits the righteousness of His Son as our own. We are counted righteous in Christ.

If we think of regeneration as comparable to the work of a surgeon creating a new heart, justification would then be comparable to the work of a judge. It is an external, legal declaration by God of our position before God – namely that we are now righteous, or clean, or “not guilty” before Him.

Paul writes in **2 Cor. 5:21** concerning this imputed righteousness, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Later, Paul would write to the Philippians in **Philippians 3:4-9** ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

We are justified by faith alone, in Christ alone, not by our works.

It's instantaneous upon our true confession of faith in Christ. “Christ does not simply merit for us grace so that we can then produce good works and earn our way to heaven,” as is the position of Roman Catholicism. Scripture is clear on this point:

- **Galatians 2:16** “A man is *not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ*. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, *because by observing the law no one will be justified.*”

Our faith in Christ is the “trigger” for justification. Faith is itself a gift of God that we have no ability to obtain or exercise on our own. Left alone we simply cannot produce saving faith, and we cannot earn faith or salvation by any act or merit on our part. We are justified by God’s grace alone through faith alone.

So, in this way, it is all of grace. The grace of God in giving us saving faith. And the grace of God in rendering that saving faith sufficient to justify us through the work of Christ.

Have you ever wondered why faith is the means that God uses to justify the sinner? Why didn’t God use love or humility or kindness? Well, God uses faith because it goes exactly contrary to dependence on ourselves. Trusting God for our righteousness is in direct conflict with man’s desire to depend on his own good works for salvation. It is God who will receive the praise and glory in salvation and not man. It is Christ’s righteousness that makes us not guilty.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Questions - (1) In what ways is a proper understanding of justification essential or even helpful to our understanding of our salvation. (2) In what ways is a proper understanding of justification essential to the proper proclamation of the gospel and to our evangelism?

Questions or Comments?

PRAYER

Optional for Justification: Heidelberg Catechism...

60. Q. How are you righteous before God?

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.¹ Although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God’s commandments, have never kept any of them,² and am still inclined to all evil,³ yet God, without any merit of my own,⁴ out of mere grace,⁵ imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.⁶ He grants these to me as if I had never had

nor committed any sin, and as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me,⁷ if only I accept this gift with a believing heart.⁸

[1 Rom 3:21-28; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8, 9; Phil 3:8-11. 2 Rom 3:9, 10. 3 Rom 7:23. 4 Deut 9:6; Ezek 36:22; Tit 3:4, 5. 5 Rom 3:24; Eph 2:8. 6 Rom 4:3-5; 2 Cor 5:17-19; 1 Jn 2:1, 2. 7 Rom 4:24, 25; 2 Cor 5:21. 8 Jn 3:18; Acts 16:30, 31; Rom 3:22.]¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/pdf/lords-days/Heidelberg-Catechism.pdf>