



Core Seminar Systematic Theology II Session 21: Plan of Redemption (pt. 3)

PRAYER

WELCOME & PRAYER

I. Introduction

Over the last two weeks, we have been looking at God's glorious **plan of redemption**. As I said last week, 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 in Section 1 of your handouts.

A couple of weeks ago, we spoke about the **first three steps** or stages of the salvation order—**election, the gospel call, and regeneration**. Then, last week, we took a look at the **two next stages**—**conversion and justification**. We also took a look at the idea of **Union with Christ** and how it manifests itself through the act of conversion and is the reality of our justification. Today, we will look at the **next three steps** or stages of the salvation order—**adoption, sanctification, and perseverance**.

In other words, you could say that we will be taking a look at God's glorious work to adopt rebellious sinners into his own family, to sanctify them, and, then, to preserve them unto the end.

II. ADOPTION

The first subject we want to think about is **Adoption**. This idea of adoption isn't a foreign concept to us. It's where the believer, who was **once a stranger to God**, enters God's family and becomes a child of God.

I can remember my own son's adoption. This little life brought into our family. At 11:30am on September 9, 2011, we were childless. A little boy was in the world but he was not ours. However, by 9pm that evening, we had been given a son. He was fully ours, never to be given back. Once a stranger to us, he now became the focal point of our lives. He became our child.

And so it is with the Christian the minute that he or she places faith in Jesus Christ.

Adoption, as one theologian puts it is: “that saving blessing wherein believers, by virtue of their communion with the true Son of God, share in his sonship by grace, are given the right to be called and received as beloved children of the Father, and inherit the immeasurable rights and privileges secured by the only begotten Son, Jesus. By adoption, the redeemed become sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; they are introduced into and given the privileges of God’s family.”

When does it happen? Well, as I alluded to before, adoption comes **after** a sinner is converted and expresses faith in God.

John 1:12 says that, “**to those who *believed in his name*, he gave the right to become children of God.**”

The sinner, having been pardoned and constituted righteous in God’s sight (justified), also becomes the recipient of sonship. The justified sinner, then, is adopted into God’s family. You gain freedom *and* a father all in the same moment!

This relationship is what we most desire as Christians. The gospel isn’t primarily about facts, friends, but being brought into a relationship with God (Phil. 3:7-8). This is what it’s all about!

If you’re a Christian here this morning, I wonder how this strikes you. In a fallen world where relationships are broken, divorce is widespread, and children are estranged from their parents and other siblings, does it matter to you that you always have a Father in Heaven who loves you and cares for you?

Whereas the doctrine of justification speaks to the relationship of the Christian to God as *Lawgiver and Judge*—he declares you righteous—the doctrine of adoption speaks to the relationship of the Christian to God *as His son or daughter*.

And so we see that God does more than justify us – He gives us an intimate relationship with Himself as children of the Most High.

Well, as awesome as this doctrine is, let’s take a look at where we find it in the Bible:

(1) Turn with me in your Bibles to **Ephesians 1:4-5**. The first thing we want to see is that, in love, the Father predestinated the believer’s adoption in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says, “**For He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love He [the Father] *predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.***”

So, the adoption he has granted us has been his plan since the beginning of the world.

(2) Now turn with me to **Galatians 4, verse 6**. We want to see here that the Father sent his Son into the world to do the redemptive work necessary not only for our salvation, but for the purpose of our adoption.

Galatians 4:6 says, **“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”**

Do you see? Adoption was in Christ’s view as he went to the cross. The Father had His own Son go to the cross so that we might become his children!

(3) Turn with me now to **Romans 8, verses 14-17**. In this passage, I want you to see that the Father sent forth the Spirit of his Son into the heart of the believer, for the distinct purpose of **assuring** the believer that he or she is the Father’s child.

Romans 8:14-17 says, **“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”**

The assurance of our salvation is wrapped up in our adoption as God’s children.

(4) Lastly, look with me a few verses down, at **verse 23**. Notice here that the child of God, having received the Spirit of adoption, awaits the final stage of his adoption, when his fallen mortal body will be redeemed from its corruption and brought to a state of glory like that of Christ.

Romans 8:23 says, **“...we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”**¹

So, we have been adopted as God’s children but the full effects—the full consummation—of that adoption is still awaiting us in heaven.

Let’s look at the implications of the Christian being adopted:

- The fact that God relates to us as Father means that ...
 - He loves us! *1 Jn 3:1 "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"*
 - He understands us! *Ps 103:13-14 "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."*
 - He provides for us and gives good gifts! *Mt 7:11 "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

¹ While adoption has a present view shown in Romans 8:15, it also has a future view where we receive the full inheritance of our sonship.

- He leads us by the Holy Spirit! *Ro 8:14 "because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."*
- He disciplines us and keeps us on the path of life! *Heb 12:5-6 "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.""*
- He makes us a family! *1 Ti 5:1-2 "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."*
- Finally, He makes us an heir! *Ga 4:7 "So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."*
 - An heir of what? In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul addresses a division in the Corinthian church where people were boasting and grumbling in the stuff of this life.
 - He says: *"So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (1 Co 3:21-23).*
 - So, all things are ours in Christ. We are the rightful heirs of it all!

Jonathan Edwards spoke well about the doctrine of adoption. He wrote: "God makes His servants His children: all that serve Him, He adopts them and gives them a right to the glorious privileges of the sons of God. He calls them no more servants, but He calls them children. He manifests Himself to them, makes them His intimate friends, His heirs and joint-heirs with His Son. He showers His love upon them and embraces them in His arms, and dwells in their souls and makes His dwelling with them, and gives Himself to them to be their father and their portion. In this life He will frequently refresh them with the spiritual dews of heaven. He will shine upon them with beams of light and love. But hereafter He will make them perfectly happy, and that forevermore. Was there ever so good a Master as this?"²

Well, when a person is adopted into God's family, the old adage "like father, like son" begins to ring true, as true sanctification begins, which leads us to our next topic ... sanctification.

III. SANCTIFICATION

Let's begin by looking at CHBC's Statement of Faith and how it defines sanctification:

² Jonathan Edwards "Christian Liberty: A Sermon on James 1:25," in *Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 10, Ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven: Yale, 1992), 630. Edwards was 18 years old when he preached this sermon.

Article X, Of Sanctification, CHBC Statement of Faith

We believe that Sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of his holiness; that it is a progressive work; that it is begun in regeneration; and that it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the Sealer and Comforter, in the continual use of the appointed means, - especially, the word of God, self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness and prayer.

Put another way, Sanctification is said to be “that saving blessing wherein believers, by virtue of being joined to Jesus Christ, the Holy One, share in the holiness of Christ, bear the title of saints, and progressively realize the holiness that is already ours in Him. It is therefore that act of salvation in which God richly blesses us by bringing us into increasing conformity to his perfect image, Jesus.”

Put more simply, sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.

There are 4 things that should be understood about the nature of sanctification.

(1) First, sanctification is **positional** or **definitive** and occurs the *moment that we are regenerated* (born again). When we are regenerated, and united with Christ, there is a definitive breach with sin and the setting apart or the committing to holiness and righteousness in the sinner.

We see this in **Romans 6**, when Paul writes that, “We’ve died to sin and been made alive in Christ. Sin no longer reigns over us. We are no longer under the power of sin.” ... That initial setting apart from sin for God is what we call **definitive sanctification**.

Whereas we were slaves to sin before our conversion, through our union with Christ in his death and resurrection, we have been definitively sanctified, such that we are no longer slaves to sin and no longer under the law but ruled now by grace.

Wayne Grudem puts it this way, “once we have been born again, there is a moral change that happens in us such that we cannot continue to sin as a habit or pattern of life (1 John 3:9), because the power of new spiritual life within us keeps us from yielding to a life of sin.”³

That’s the first point.

(2) Second, while the Bible speaks about a definite beginning to sanctification, it also sees sanctification as a process that continues throughout the Christian life. In this way it is **progressive**. We grow in holiness by God’s grace the rest of our lives.

Turn with me to **2 Cor. 3:18**. Paul says that we are progressively becoming more and more like Christ as we live out our Christian lives. Look what he says ...

³ Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology, p. 746.

- a) 2 Cor. 3:18 "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

Turn with me now to **Phil. 3:13**. Here, Paul is talking about his own state of sanctification ...

- b) Philippians 3:13-14 "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Even Paul, here, does not consider himself perfectly holy. He knows he needs work. He knows that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in him to sanctify him and make him into the image of the Son. And so it is with us.

(3) Third, while we are being made into the image of Christ Jesus, we must understand that perfect holiness is never had in this lifetime. Our sanctification will never be completed in this life. Rather, perfect holiness—complete sanctification—is only attained at death.

Turn to **1 John 3. Starting in verse 2**. When does perfect holiness happen? John writes ...

- c) 1 John 3:2-3 "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

The author of **Hebrews** writes in **chapter 12** that it is *only* when we come into the presence of God that we will be made perfect.

(4) Finally, fourth, sanctification is a two-fold process. It is both our work and God's work.

Turn with me to **Phil. 2, beginning in verse 12**. You think of the words of Paul, where the work of man and God is spoken of as active in the sanctification process. Paul writes in verse 12 ...

- d) Phil. 2:12-13, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

In order to understand this concept, we must understand that sanctification is primarily a work of God. That's why Paul can pray in **1 Thess. 5**, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely."

The author of **Hebrews** writes in **chapter 13**, "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal

covenant, 21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us[a] that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.”

So, it is God who is the primary actor in our sanctification. And the person of the Godhead most active in this process is the Holy Spirit.

That is why Paul can write in Galatians 5 that if we grow in sanctification, we “walk by the Spirit” and are “led by the Spirit.” The Spirit of holiness works within us to change our passions, desires, attitudes, and actions.

But we must also realize that *we* are also involved actors in the sanctification process. We play both a *passive* role as well as an *active* role.

We play the *passive* role as it relates to our trusting in God in to sanctify us and praying to God that he will work in us to conform us into his Son.

Turn with me to **Romans 8:13** again ... Paul writes in **Romans 8:13**, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Paul realized that we are utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit’s working in us to grow in our sanctification.

So, yes, we do play a passive role in the sanctification process, but we also play an active role as well.

You’ll note that in the same verse, Paul commands his listeners to “put to death the deeds of the body.” ... Sure, it’s by the Spirit that we are empowered to do this, but at the end of the day, we must do it!

Notice that it isn’t the *Holy Spirit* that is commanded to put to death the deeds of the body, but rather Christians! We are called, with the Spirit’s help, to put to death the deeds of the flesh.

This is why Paul can write in **Philippians 4**, “**work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**” We can work it out by acting upon the Spirit’s prompting and empowerment “to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Questions or Comments?

IV. PERSEVERANCE

So if God is sanctifying those he elected, regenerated, justified and adopted, then can a believer fall from their justified state?

To answer that, let’s take a look at CHBC’s statement of faith:

Article XI, Of the Perseverance of Saints, CHBC Statement of Faith

We believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors; that a special Providence watches over their welfare; and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

In other words, true Christians cannot lose their salvation.

Let's take a closer look at what are basically two parts or sides of this definition. First, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints affirms that ... All Who Are Truly Born Again Will Persevere to the End.

1. All Who Are Truly Born Again Will Persevere to the End

This idea, while somewhat controversial, is clearly borne out in scripture...

Turn to **John 6 with me. Beginning in verse 38**, Jesus speaks about why he came down from heaven. Verse 38 ... **“I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me; and this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose none of all that He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”**

Note the certainty in the language of this passage – Jesus will lose none, or no one, as it were. Jesus makes the emphatic statement that He *will* raise up Christians on the last day. It's not “He hopes” or “if all goes well.” And it's not “if they hang in there and don't lose their salvation.” He says that he will. That's God making a promise.

Later in the same gospel of John, Jesus declares, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.”**

Again, there is no ambiguity. No one – not other people, not Satan, not even we ourselves – can separate us from God once He has brought us to Himself.

Also, we see further evidence for this doctrine because God has placed His “seal” upon us...

Turn to **Ephesians 1, verse 13**. Paul is speaking about assurance here. Verse 13 ... **“In Him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory...”** (Eph. 1:13-14)

We cannot and will not lose our salvation if we are in Christ Jesus. That is the message of the New Testament, and that is the promise of the very one who has written our names in the Lamb's

book of life. Rest assured that if you are in Christ, you are His for all of eternity. God will keep you. He will preserve you to the end.

2. Only Those Who Persevere to the End Have Been Truly Born Again

Of course, you're asking yourself, then why, Charles, do I see people "fall away" from the faith? For that let's look back at CHBC's statement of faith.

Note that it reads "We believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors."

While the Bible stresses the fact that God's power will keep the one who has been born again until the end, the Bible *also* stresses the fact that *only* those who persevere to the end can be said to have been truly born again.

In other words, only the truly saved will continually evidence faith and repentance until death.

For those who turn their back on the faith and "fall away," the Bible tells us that we can be sure they never were *truly* saved. We must remember that God *guarantees* that those who are truly saved will make it. God does preserve the Christian in his faith – so perseverance *is* the *true* sign that one is truly a believer.

Turn to Colossians 1 for me. Let's pick it up in verse 22, where Paul is explaining why Christ had to die on the cross ... Paul writes, "**[God] has reconciled you by Christ's physical body...in order to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel**" (Col. 1:22-23)

The point here is that remaining in faith is one of the clear signs that someone is truly in the fold. Now, this idea is *not* meant to cause true believers fear or anxiety that because they struggle with a certain sin they have fallen away from God's grace and are not truly saved. If we're saved by God's grace and that is our basis, then we can be sure that we won't fall away by our own works!

Rather, it's meant to call to account and warn those who have fallen away and continue in their sin and cease to exhibit the fruit of salvation, that their continued unrepentance is a very good indication that their faith was never real.

3. Those Who Finally Fall Away May Give Many External Signs of Conversion

But what about those who finally fall away but gave, at some point in their life, external signs of conversion? What do we do with that? Well, according to Jesus, the external signs were in fact false signs, born out as such by the passage of time.

If you remember Jesus' parable about the sower, you will recall that the seed that was sown actually sprung up in several different places. The seed grew for a time in the rocky soil; it grew for a time in the thorny soil, and it flourished in the good soil. Listen to how Jesus explains those stony-ground and thorny-ground hearers of the gospel:

Some people are like seed sown on rocky places, they hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

These are clearly not Christians, despite what might have been an encouraging appearance at the beginning.

Whether these people are conscious “false brethren,” as Paul calls some who pretend to be Christians—purposefully being deceitful for whatever reason, ... or whether they are self-deceived in some way, thinking they are Christians when they're not ... these people can still outwardly look like genuine believers.

In either case, though, Scripture is clear as to their fate...

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me...’” (Matt. 7:21-23)

Notice the language here; it's not “I knew you and you turned from me,” it's not “I no longer know you,” it's “I *never* knew you,” again driving home the idea that there is no such thing biblically as the loss of *true* salvation.

I John 2:19 sums this idea up well, **“They went out from us, but they did not 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.”**

Questions or Comments?

Friends, as we close, let me end with this. While we must be on the lookout for false believers, we should be encouraged to see the fruit in our own lives and the lives of others, as it evidences God's grace of redemption in their lives and our own.

And, for that reason, it is a mercy of God to grant us fruit in our lives. He gives fruit to us so that we can see His handiwork in our lives and be assured of salvation.

We don't have time this morning to go into the details of the doctrine of assurance, but do rest assured that the same God that raised you from the dead is the same God who can and will preserve you to the end, if you are in Christ.

Let's pray.