

Salvation Session 6

Our Response to Our Salvation

We've seen over the course of our series what a great salvation we've received. Our Father has propitiated his wrath over our sins, redeemed from our slavery to sin, justified us – or given us a right standing before him, reconciled us to himself once again for the first time since the Fall, and made a new covenant with us. All this was achieved through the shedding of the blood of his one and only son Jesus Christ on a Roman cross. Even more amazingly this salvation is freely given to us not through any merit of our own – we can contribute absolutely nothing to our salvation, it's all from God – indeed it was provided for us whilst we were hell deserving sinners. What wonderful love.

For Ourselves

So, how should we respond to God's wonderful provision for us? I believe we need to show our gratitude for God's love and mercy by living holy lives and by conducting ourselves in a way that's honouring and pleasing to our Father. We do this not to save ourselves, not to earn our salvation – that would have been impossible, but out of gratitude for the fact that we've already been saved through the grace and mercy of our Father.

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:11-14 NIV)

So we must do our best to live holy lives:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:1-2 NIV)

and

“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. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” (Ephesians 1:3-6 NIV)

and

“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no-one should wrong his brother

or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.” (1Thesalonians 3:12-4:8 NIV)

and

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” (1 Peter 1:13-19 NIV)

We were united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Paul deals with this issue very well at the beginning of Romans chapter 6:

“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.” (Romans 6:3-12 NIV)

So, our old life of sin and guilt and shame has been terminated and an entirely new life of holiness forgiveness and freedom has begun. Because our new self, though redeemed is still fallen (because our sanctification is not yet completed) a double attitude is necessary – self denial and self affirmation.

As regards self denial the invitation of Jesus is plain:

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34 NIV)

Jesus had to go to the cross and we, his followers, must each take up our cross and follow him. Our cross is the symbol of death to the self. This does not necessarily imply martyrdom (although it can), rather it's renouncing our supposed right to go our own way, a turning away from the idolatry of self centeredness. As Paul puts it:

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24 NIV)

thus we nail our slippery fallen nature to the cross.

Also we need to carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our bodies:

“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” (2 Corinthians 4:10 NIV)

So, to summarise, we see that for Christians there are three different deaths and resurrections. Firstly, there is the death to sin and the subsequent life to God. Secondly, there is the death to self and a subsequent life of fellowship with God. Thirdly, there is the carrying of the dying of Jesus in our bodies so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our bodies which we've just looked at.

Moving on, we know that we seek to live holy lives primarily to please God, but let us not forget that Christ has promised to return, and when he comes again it will not be as a helpless babe but rather as our Lord and Master and our judge:

“But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.” (2 Peter 3:5-14 NIV) and

“So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:9-10 NIV)

Of course, those who us who have genuinely turned to Christ in true faith, have nothing to fear from this judgement; for we have been justified through Christ’s blood and are now holy and righteous in God’s sight – even though, as we saw when we looked at sanctification, we will not be made actually and objectively righteous until after the second coming of Christ.

Here I just want to comment briefly on the permanence of the salvation we have received. Along with Calvin (although let me say that I don’t believe in all of Calvin’s concepts and ideas) I believe that once we are saved we are always saved – unless we decide to deliberately and permanently reject our salvation and turn our backs on God.

Look at what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2:

“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.” (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV) and in 2 Timothy:

“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Timothy 1:8-10 NIV)

and in Titus chapter 3:

“But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour,” (Titus 3:4-6 NIV)

So God’s grace, his forgiveness is offered to all who confess their faith in Christ. Look also at John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NIV)

God’s forgiveness is offered to all on the condition of faith confessed, but no condition follows our confession of faith. If more were required, then we would have to say that our salvation is through faith plus works. But that is not what scripture says. Offensive as it may be once you express a real genuine faith in Christ you are eternally saved.

Yes, as we’ve been saying, we should feel called to live holy and Godly lives out of gratitude for what God has done for us – and I believe that God will reward those who do so – but that’s another story.

For Others

We are ambassadors of God’s reconciliation through Christ:

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 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. So from now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God’s fellow-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2 NIV)

We must therefore be reconciled to others just as God has reconciled us to himself and more than that we must evangelise, we must preach the gospel, in order to bring others to a reconciliation with God and into eternal life with him. We need to remember Christ’s important teaching to us about reconciliation to others:

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:20-24 NIV)

As Jesus taught us when he was teaching the disciples how to pray:

“your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:10-15 NIV)

It is impossible to enter into the reconciliation that Christ died to accomplish and at the same time to nourish grudges against our fellow human beings. All our relationships are radically transformed by the cross. The cross has created a new community whose members belong to Christ and of which he, as the new Adam, is the head. We must love our neighbours as ourselves.

This will lead us into a life of service. Christ said:

“Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”” (Matthew 20:25-28 NIV)

In his letter to the Philippians Paul writes:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:3-8 NIV)

The love we are to have for others is essentially self giving, and since our most valuable possession is our life, the greatest love is seen in laying it down for others. The obvious example of this is Christ on the cross, but God does more than just give us this example; he puts His love within us. With the love of God both revealed to us and indwelling us we have a double inescapable incentive to give ourselves in love.

So love gives food to the hungry, shelter to the homeless, help to the destitute, friendship to the lonely, comfort to the sad. Provided always that these gifts are tokens of the giving of the self; because we can give all these things and yet withhold ourselves

For Our Enemies

As Christians we are called to be peacemakers:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9 NIV)

and to seek peace and pursue it:

“He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.” (1 Peter 3:11 NIV)

At the same time scripture teaches that it may not always be possible to have peace with our enemies:

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18 NIV)

But, it’s clear that we are to make every effort even if it’s costly – after all God reconciled us to himself through the extremely costly strategy of the cross.

We never have the right to refuse forgiveness, let alone take revenge:

“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19 NIV)

but we are not to cheapen forgiveness by offering it prematurely when there has been no repentance:

“So watch yourselves. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”” (Luke 17:3-4 NIV)

Christian peacemaking exhibits the love and justice – and so the pain – of the cross.

But, what are we to do about evil? Well Paul has much to say on this issue in Romans chapters 12 and 13:

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.” (Romans 12:9-13:7 NIV)

There is far too much in this passage for us to completely analyse it this morning, but I do want to make a few points.

Hate what is evil, cling to what is good (12:9)

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody (12:17)

Do not be overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good (12:21)

Legitimate authorities are God's servants to do us good, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the evildoer (13:1-4)

Note that we're commanded to hate evil. God hates evil because his love is holy love and we must hate it too. We absolutely mustn't take revenge or repay evil for evil, for that would just increase the amount of evil in the world. Christ's behaviour on the cross sets an example for us. Rather we overcome evil with good. Paul says that we should bless those who persecute us and that if our enemy is hungry we should feed him. Revenge is to be replaced by service.

However, evil is to be punished by the legitimate authorities which God has put in place. Our personal role is very different from an official role. The state has divine authority and we are not *normally* to be subversives. I say normally here for what happens if the ruler in question is a Hitler or a Stalin or an Idi Amin? Is Paul saying that we must submit even to authorities such as these? Certainly Paul was aware that rulers could be unjust, after all he'd been unjustly flogged and beaten many times. In my view few passages of scripture have suffered as much misinterpretation and misuse as these opening verses of Chapter 13. President Botha of South Africa used to regularly read them out to justify his apartheid regime.

I believe that when Paul depicts rulers in such a favourable light, as commending the right and opposing the wrong, Paul is stating the divine ideal, not the human reality. We must also remember that Paul was writing to the specific situation of Roman Christians at that time. I think the overriding principle is clear – we are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to God but not further, because Paul says that the authority of the state derives from and is delegated by God. If the state commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, then our plain Christian duty is to resist, not to submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God. As Peter and the other apostles put it to the Sanhedrin: “We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:29). In fact I think it's quite significant that Paul says “submit” to authorities rather than “obey” authorities, our submission to authorities is to be interpreted in the light of our overarching submission to God.

In 13:4-7, Paul goes on to make it clear that the state is to exercise its authority for the good of its subjects. So the ministry of the state is to promote good and renounce and punish evil. We as subjects must obey the state, so long as the state does not command what is contrary to God's laws, and the state must exercise its ministry for the good of its subjects using its God given authority, promoting good and punishing evil.

Finally, let us remember that on the cross God did not refuse to punish evil, but rather accepted the punishment himself in the person of his son. At the cross human evil was both punished and overcome and God's justice and mercy were both satisfied.