

Salvation: God's Love Forever

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, April 28, 2013

“We Shall Be Saved By His Life”

In our last few studies, we've been seeking to understand the 'atonement' --that is, how it is that we are saved by Jesus' death. But it's not His death alone that saves us. We need life as well. And praise God!--we are fully saved by a spiritual union with His whole Person--including His endless life! As Paul wrote in Romans 5:10, "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."¹

THE 'WHY'
OF
SALVATION

THE 'WHAT'
OF
SALVATION

THE 'HOW'
OF
SALVATION
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THE 'WHO'
OF
SALVATION

THE 'WHEN'
OF
SALVATION

THE 'WHERE'
OF
SALVATION

THE 'WONDER'
OF
SALVATION

I. HOW IT IS THAT WE HAVE BEEN UNITED TO JESUS' LIFE?

- A. In Colossians 2:11-12, the apostle Paul writes, "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."
1. The Old Testament covenant sign of circumcision is here being used to describe the spiritual work of the Holy Spirit in removing from us our former bondage of slavery to sin. "For sin shall no longer have dominion over you," as Paul tells us elsewhere, "for you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). This was accomplished for us "by the circumcision of Christ". He died for us to atone for our sins and to sever us from sin's dominance over us.
 2. But this isn't the only thing that was done for us. In fact, our circumcision in Christ through His death is dependent upon another work that was done for us in relation to Him. We are also united to Jesus' death--and to His endless life as well--by what Paul calls "baptism". "Or do you not know," as Paul puts it in Romans 6:3-4, "that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life". This isn't speaking of the ceremony of baptism that is performed in a church. Rather, it speaks of a work of the Holy Spirit upon a believer--of which the outward ceremony of baptism is only a symbol; a work in which the Holy Spirit connects the believer directly and permanently to the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. This wonderful work of the Spirit on our behalf is also spoken of in Galatians 3:26-27; where it says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."
- B. The Greek word that's used--*baptizmo*--is related to the idea of "dipping" something into something else in such a way that the item dipped becomes permanently "identified" with the thing into which it is dipped. (If, for example, someone was to dip a piece of white cloth into a pot of purple dye, that white cloth would become "purple"--that is, permanently identified with the dye into which it had been 'baptized'.) This pictures for us the way the Holy Spirit forever unites the believer with the work of Jesus in all its dimensions; spiritually "dipping" the believer, as it were, into Jesus, and causing the believer to be permanently "identified" with Him in every aspect--His death, His burial, His resurrection, and His endless life.

II. WHAT HAPPENS TO US BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN UNITED TO CHRIST'S LIFE?

- A. We are regenerated--that is "made alive again". We were spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. And praise God, Jesus' death atones completely for all our sins. But God has not left us in a state of spiritual death. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:4-5, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . ."
- B. We have not only been made alive, but we "live". Ours is a 'living' union with Christ--an ongoing life that never ends. We don't have to wait for 'eternal life' to begin to be ours sometime in the future. We are living that eternal life now. We live it in a frail body of clay; but the life we now live in it will go on eternally. Ours is truly a new life in full union with Christ. As Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."
- C. We are justified--that is, "declared righteous". God so united us to our Savior that He has imputed to us (that is, credited to our account) all the perfect righteousness of Christ Himself. When God now looks at us, He actually sees us as forever righteous as His own Son. Paul wrote, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Philippians 3:8-9). And this isn't done for us in an impersonal way--as if Jesus has paid our debt for us from a distance and then has nothing further to do with us; or as if we can now walk around in His righteousness in a way that's apart from Him. Rather, it is done through the most personal and intimate spiritual union possible. We are united to Him in such a way that He actually becomes our righteousness! As 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption--that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'"
- D. We are 'sanctified'--that is, made increasingly righteous in actual practice. We cannot live righteously--in accordance with what we are spiritually--apart from a full union with Jesus. He said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4). As Paul said, "we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).
- E. We persevere in the Christian life. Apart from a union with Jesus in the fullness of His life, we could not remain faithful to Him to the very end. But if we are truly redeemed by Jesus, God so unites us to Him that we will never be lost to Him. He said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28).
- F. We have blessedness in physical death. We will never need to fear death because we are in spiritual union with Christ. He has already tasted of the same physical death we must one day experience (unless, of course, He returns for us before then). And we still belong to Him, and exist in Him, even if we have physically died. Paul wrote, "For if we live, we live to the

Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 8:38-39). Not even death can separate us from Him (Romans 8:38). Paul victoriously affirmed his own "earnest expectation and hope" in the prospect of death; "that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:20-21).

- G. We will be physically raised from death with Christ. Just as Jesus was raised from physical death, we who are united to Him will also be raised from physical death. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." As Jesus Himself told His disciples before He went to the cross, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19). We who are in Him can willingly 'lose' our life for Him; knowing as He said, "whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25).
- H. We will be eternally glorified with Christ. Our salvation is not truly complete unless we are--at the end of it all--fully glorified in Christ. And because of our full union with Jesus, we *will* be glorified with Him, and will--in fact--share eternally in the glory that He Himself now enjoys. As Paul wrote, "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). And as John has put it, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

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Put all the pieces all together. What does it mean to be saved? Certainly, it means to be cleansed of all our sins by faith in the blood of Jesus. But that's only the beginning. To be fully saved in the sight of God means to be made alive from the spiritual death caused by our sins, to live-out eternal life on earth in the flesh right now now, to be declared 100% righteous in God's sight, to be increasingly sanctified in the way we live, to be preserved in that process of sanctification all the way to the very end, to enjoy the blessedness of being Christ's own beloved people after death, to have our bodies one day raised from the dead in glorious resurrection, and to share with the glory of Christ Himself throughout eternity!

As Paul has said, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). And it is by our spiritual union with Christ that we are assured that He absolutely will!

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version; copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

²The following is adapted from Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), pp. 59-64.