Doctrine of Salvation/Regeneration/Conversion

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Key Passage: Luke 19:1-10

Salvation:
God's Action/Man's Response

Salvation is one of the most needed and the least sought after things in the universe. As the most valuable of all possessions, it is the least prized. Of all the possible acquisitions of life, salvation costs the most to provide but can be obtained free of charge. It is highly spoken of by God and available to all persons; but men regard it lightly, and few accept it.

The Doctrine of Salvation
Sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa. 53:5-6, NASB). Then Christ came just as the prophets had said he would. He defeated the power of evil and conquered death. He gave forgiveness and life to those who would believe him and follow him. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21, NASB); "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (I Pet. 2:24, NASB).

The experience of salvation through Christ is definite and forever. The power and consequence of sin are real. Rescue from the power and consequence of sin takes place because God acts to bring it to pass and because man responds and permits the rescue to take place. The rescue itself has many facets that affect the individual in many ways.

The purpose of this chapter is to look only at the act of rescue. We shall do so from three perspectives:

1. The nature of salvation (what it is and what it isn't)
2. The transaction of salvation (what has to happen to bring salvation to pass)
3. The witness to salvation (the results that testify to the reality of salvation).

THE NATURE OF SALVATION

The word salvation derives its meaning from the term to save. The word save means to make whole which comes from a root idea meaning wholeness. The word indicates setting free that which is bound or healing that which is wounded or broken. The concept from both the Old Testament and the New Testament most often means that a person is released from bondage. It also can mean deliverance from any kind of danger or peril. From our viewpoint, salvation is from an old existence of sin and its guilt to a new life.

Q. What was the first indication in the account of Zaccheus of his non-wholeness?
Q. What does the name Zaccheus mean? How does this clash with his life?

Being pardoned, justified, and freed from sin and its consequences is a changing experience that brings about a radical difference in a person. One part of that difference is immediate and final. One part of that difference is as immediate as it is radical. It is the immediate movement from death into life and from condemnation to justification. There is another aspect in salvation—one that is not immediate but is continuous. This aspect is God's working in the believer to develop a new character and to nourish a new relationship between the believer and himself.

**PERSONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY**

Write an answer to the following question: What does salvation in Christ mean to you? Try to give an answer that would be clear to a person who is not a Christian.

**THE TRANSACTION OF SALVATION**

Salvation is a gift, God is the giver, and man is the recipient. What are the elements in this transaction? What has to take place for this giving and receiving to occur?

The initiative rests with God. With convicting power, he confronts the lost person with the truth of the gospel. He makes the way of forgiveness known and offers the gift of salvation. The necessity to respond rests with man. This response involves repentance (his attitude toward his sin) and faith (his attitude toward God). Examine these two more closely.

**PERSONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY**

Look up and study the meaning of the word repentance. Use a Bible dictionary if possible. Then study Psalm 51. Note the indications of David's repentance. Conclude the exercise by writing an honest description of your attitude toward sin.

**THE WITNESS TO SALVATION**

Behavior and feelings vary greatly from person to person. However, a thread of consistency weaves its way through the great variety of human responses to the salvation experiences. There are some feelings and reactions that are consistent with all persons when they are saved. These uniformly consistent experiences give witness to the fact that the salvation experience has indeed taken place. These three witnesses are the internal witness, the fraternal witness, and the external witness.

**SUMMARY**
The word salvation has a two-fold idea: to set free that which is bound and to heal that which is wounded. Salvation in Christ has both of these effects in the life of the believer. The salvation event takes place when the lost person trusts Christ for forgiveness. Salvation is not the result of any human attainment or achievement. It is offered by God to any who will receive it.

When a person becomes a Christian, there are three ways he can be assured of the reality of salvation. First, the Holy Spirit works in the heart of the believer and gives a sense of being at peace with God and of being free. The believer experiences a new relationship and oneness with other believers because of the common experience they share in God's reconciling love. The believer has both the desire and the power to pattern his life after Christ's life.

**Salvation: the Transforming Event.** "transform\ tran(t)s 'fa(a)rm\ vb [ME transformen, fr. L transformare, fr. trans- + formare to form, fr. forma form\] vt i a: to change in composition or structure. b: to change the outward form or appearance of c: to change in character or condition."

The salvation experience is an experience that is filled with wonder and the unexpected. No matter how clearly the salvation experience has been described and explained, there is no way the individual can be prepared for what actually happens. No other experience in life brings about so radical a change. The chapter title declares salvation to be a transforming event. This is an accurate description, because every aspect of a person's being is touched and is transformed. "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Con 5:17, NASB).

The changes produced by salvation are so numerous, so radical, and so far-reaching that no single word or phrase can describe them all fully. Baptists and other Christian groups use a number of words and phrases to list, to differentiate, and to define the many changes that are a part of the salvation experience.

**PERSONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY 20**

Before studying further, write your own definitions of the following terms: regeneration, conversion, sanctification, perseverance, adoption, reconciliation, and justification.

**The Doctrine of Salvation**

As you study this chapter, you will study the terms in the preceding personal learning activity. You will see how every aspect of personhood is changed: life-style, relationships, motivations, values, and even the nature of one's existence. You will see how some of these changes are immediate while others are not complete after a lifetime.

Also, as you study this chapter, you should bear in mind an important principle. The salvation event is a singular event. It is an event with numerous aspects that affect the individual in a number of different ways. Salvation in some respects is immediate and final. For example, being raised from spiritual death to spiritual life is immediate, irrevocable, and final. Other aspects of salvation such as forgiveness are repeated over and over in the life of the saved person. A third perspective on salvation is that it is a process that begins at the
As you study this chapter, you will study several different terms that describe different aspects of the salvation event. Remember that salvation does not happen in installments. It is a singular event. The terms studied in this chapter all examine the same event but from different perspectives.

REGENERATION: THE NEW BIRTH
Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again. He was speaking of the same experience that we also describe as the new birth and as regeneration. Being brought out of spiritual death into spiritual life cannot express all the ideas that are a part of the salvation experience. However, this term does so more nearly than any of the other terms do. The term regeneration speaks specifically of being brought from spiritual death into spiritual life. However, all the other concepts studied in this chapter are at least implied in the idea of having been dead and now being alive.

Q. What does “regeneration” mean to you?

PERSONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY 21
Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Then identify the words or phrases that relate to the following facts about regeneration:

1. Man's inner condition as a sinner is the cause of spiritual death.
2. A person's actions are indications of the fact that he is spiritually dead.
3. Regeneration is a divine work.
4. A person's actions are indications of the fact that he has been born again.

CONVERSION: A NEW ORIENTATION
Conversion is turning away from sin toward God. The two elements are essential to each other and cannot be separated. When one genuinely turns away from sin, there is but one direction to turn: toward God. The converse is also true. One cannot turn toward God unless he has first turned away from sin. This is the deliberate act of will by which the individual turns his life from the direction in which it is traveling and redirects it toward God.

Conversion naturally speaks of a transformation in the way a person lives. But the real significance in conversion is the transformation of the values and motives that determine how the life is lived. Conversion is also the deliberate act of will by which a person turns his values and motives toward God. Conversion, therefore, is more than a reversal in the direction of one's life. It is a reversal in the perspective out of which life is lived. It is more than a renunciation of sin. It is a renunciation of the inner condition that leads to sin.
Zaccheus' conversion began with a deep realization of his need. One day he saw Jesus Christ coming in the crowd. The stories of Christ's teachings and works were so significant to him that he wanted to see this prophet in person. After Christ called Zaccheus to come from the tree, an encounter took place that transformed Zaccheus' character, behavior, and principles of action. The Scriptures take note of the intense change in his total thinking, life, and relationships (Luke 19:1-10).

Nicodemus was a great intellectual, noted as a significant ruler among the Jews; his religious stature was well respected. Nicodemus came to Jesus to find truth. His insatiable desire to know more of the truth gripped his spirit and sent him in search of truth even in spite of great personal risk. Jesus cut across all extraneous matters and spoke to his real need. The conversion was enough to change Nicodemus' entire makeup. The dialogue that started intellectually soon reshaped his concept of God, of himself, and of the meaning of life. Although the Scriptures do not record Nicodemus' conversion, both history and tradition attest to it. History records that after Jesus died on the cross, Nicodemus went with Joseph of Arimathea to bury him in a manner befitting a person of the Jewish heritage. Other occasions gave indication he truly turned from the old way and spoke his new life-experience.

Saul of Tarsus had a religious fervor that drove him to search out and to destroy the Christians. One day on the road to Damascus Saul was confronted by Jesus Christ. The background to this event probably began early when he learned of Christ's teachings. He certainly saw the evidence of what Christ had done in the life of deacon Stephen. Now on the road to Damascus Paul had a turnaround. He halted in his way of life. Christ changed not only his name but his life. Paul's new experience moved him to set his face in new directions.

FORGIVENESS AND JUSTIFICATION: A NEW STANDING
Forgiveness and justification are opposite sides of the same coin. They both describe what God does about the sin that keeps man from standing with him in a personal relationship. Sin affects one's relationship with God in two ways. Sin is both an affront to God's nature and a violation of his law. Therefore, there are both interpersonal and legal implications in what God does to transform the sinner's standing before him.

Forgiveness
Forgiveness is the "sending away" of sin. The individual is released from the guilt of sin. Remission of the punishment against sin which is eternal death is both real and necessary: "

Justification
Justification is the judicial act of God by which he declares the sinner to be free from condemnation and restores him to divine favor. By his sin, man has violated God's divine law. As a violator of God's law, the sinner is guilty and is condemned because of that guilt.

RECONCILIATION: A NEW RELATIONSHIP
Reconciliation is the restoring of a relationship between two persons. The fact that the Scriptures speak of “reconciliation” between God and man assumes that man is alienated from God. By his sin, the sinner separates himself from God.

Reconciliation should not be understood as an act directed to God to appease his anger. The opposite is true. Reconciliation is God's act of love to bring back and to restore to fellowship and to relationship those who have estranged themselves from him.

ADOPTION: A NEW FAMILY
Adoption is the admission of an outsider to some or all the privileges of a natural child. When the term is used in relation to the salvation experience, it refers to the fact that believers become God's children.

SANCTIFICATION: A NEW LIFE-STYLE
Sanctification means being separated from that which is ungodlike and being set apart to God for God's purpose. In its New Testament sense, the term refers specifically to two aspects of the salvation experience.

First, the term is used to refer to the result of redemption. Saved persons are referred to as saints or as the sanctified ones. The implication is that God once and for all has brought us apart from the dominion of sin and has set us apart for himself. The term is positional in that it refers to man's relationship with God.

There is also a second aspect to the concept of sanctification. Sanctification is also experiential—a continuing experience in the life of the believer. This aspect of the term refers to the process by which the believer wins day by day the victory over the influence of sin in his life. This is the gradual, painful elimination of the strongholds and pockets of sin in the life. Experiential sanctification is the process of growing in the likeness of Christ, of becoming more like the Father, and of being more able to know and to do his will.

PERSEVERANCE: A NEW ASSURANCE
Perseverance refers to the fact that God enables his children to continue steadfastly in faith and in obedience. The knowledge of God's enabling power in one's life gives the Christian a new assurance for living.

The lost person experiences nothing but frustration, hopelessness, and defeat in trying to understand and to cope with life. The work of the Holy Spirit is to transform that attitude to one of radiant confidence and anticipation. This confidence and anticipation are made possible by the Christian's knowledge that he will endure.

PERSONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY 20
Look up the following verses and discuss their meanings.
God works to accomplish his purpose in the life of the believer. And God does not fail. The believer's existence is not a self-contained or a self-sustained life. It is life sustained by the grace of the same Savior and Lord through whom one is justified. God wills to preserve the believers. The newborn person will persevere because it is God's will for him to do so. Perseverance is not dependent on the believer's will or strength. Rather, it is based on God's ability to keep the promise he has to keep his children safe.

Q. When we think on the experience of Zaccheus, what was it about him that made him different from others?

Q. What was it about him that made him like everyone else.

Q. What were the steps we see in the account of Zaccheus that brought him to salvation.

1. He __________________ God.
2. He __________________ God.
3. He __________________ to God.

Q. Was Zaccheus truly converted? How was the conversion experience for Zaccheus authenticated?

Q. How is your own salvation experience authenticated?