



Deeper

4. The Doctrine of Salvation

Truth



CRAWLEY
COMMUNITY
CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of Matthew chapter 24 the disciples ask Jesus an interesting question: “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” I’m not sure what answer they were expecting, but it was probably not the answer they got:

And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. [Matthew 24:4-5]

and

And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [Matthew 24:10-11]

Those are verses that we should take careful notice of. The Christian church throughout the ages, and even more so today is engaged in a battle for the truth. How do we stay true to God’s word and how do we avoid being deceived by false teaching or doctrine? The sad truth is we will all probably know people who at one point were walking strongly in the faith but now seem to have been pulled away. The why’s and wherefores of that are not really the subject of the course, but rather “How do we stay true to God’s word?” How can we do our utmost to ensure we are not deceived or distracted, or worst still become those who deceive or distract others? The simple answer is to study God’s word and to understand the truths in there, and what it says and what it does not say.

We are also more likely to be led astray by subtle twists and modifications to God’s word rather than an outright denial. Satan at no point said to Adam and Eve “God doesn’t exist, help yourself to any fruit you like.” They would have seen through that deception very quickly. Rather he asked:

“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’ [Genesis 3:1b]

We also need to be aware of those truths that are fundamental to our faith and a denial of such will instantly lead us into error as opposed to other truths that can be interpreted in different ways, and for which Christians can hold different views. An absolute truth that must be defended to the uttermost is the fact that Christ will return. The means and manner of that return, and the whole area of what happens in the end times is however subject to much debate. With such subjects the various viewpoints will be presented.

Likewise, the truth that God created the whole universe out of nothing in one single act of creation is another truth we must hold to. The manner of that creation (was it over seven literal days or seven periods of time) is another area on which much has been written and different view put forth.

This course was first presented as an eight-part course at Crawley Community Church in 2012/13 and the content and accompanying notes have been expanded and revised for 2023/24.

All verses are from the from the English Standard Version (2001)

Bible verses and passages are shown in blue, other quotes are shown in red.

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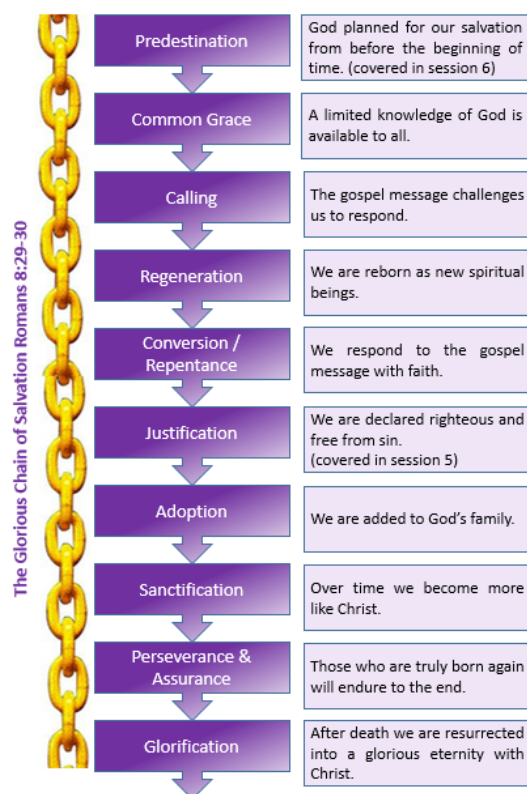
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4. The Doctrine of Salvation

We might equally call this section; ‘The Doctrine of Man’. Man is a sinner and cannot save himself and so it requires God to act and bring us to the point of salvation where we have both a knowledge of God and have responded to His call on our life by repentance and faith. Because it is God who acts it seems more appropriate therefore to call this section ‘The Doctrine of Salvation. We will in a future section look at the Doctrine of Predestination and ask the tricky question “to what extent does God plan, or foreknow, who will come to salvation and how we balance that against our free-will? And in the next Section we will be looking specifically at the Cross and the crucifixion of Christ as a fundamental means to our salvation, however in this section we will look at a few, more general aspects, of what we can loosely call ‘The Doctrine of Salvation’.

What is the process by which we are saved and grow in our knowledge of God and into the likeness of Christ? Those initial steps of Repentance and Salvation are vital, but that is just the start of a journey that last the rest of our lives.

We can talk of a ‘process’ or a ‘chain’ of salvation that reaches from the beginning of eternity to the end of eternity.



For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. [Romans 8:29-30]

Two of the steps shown above will be discussed in more detail in later sessions; Predestination in Session 6 and Justification in Session 5. These will however be mentioned briefly here to give a complete picture.

4.1 Predestination

Predestination can be defined as the fact that we did not choose to become Christians, however much it may have seemed that way, but God, through an act of His grace, chose, elected or predestined us to be Christians.

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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us[a] for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.
[Ephesians 1:3-6]

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.
[Ephesians 1:11]

As already noted, this whole doctrine will be covered in more detail in Session 6.

4.2 Common Grace

Common Grace can be defined as the grace of God whereby he gives people blessings that are not part of salvation.

God is a God of Grace, he gives undeserved gifts, not only to Christians in the fullest sense of grace, but also to unbelievers in regard to common grace. Everyone, believer, or unbeliever receives something of the goodness of God.

God is also a God of justice who punishes wrong – doing, yet when Adam and Eve sinned, they did not die immediately (although one of the consequences of sin was that they would now suffer a physical death). Likewise, when people sin today, they do not immediately die, they continue to live for many years enjoying the many blessings this world has to offer.

That implies there are blessings that are part of salvation, and it is those blessings, and that experience of God's goodness that we would define as saving faith or 'grace unto salvation.'

There are many examples of Common Grace.

The Physical Realm: The Earth is by and large a pleasant place in which to live. Believers and unbelievers share and enjoy its beauty and bounty. By God's common grace we are provided with food, warmth, shelter, and many other materials.

So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. [Matthew 5:45]

Even though nature itself is in bondage to decay (a consequence of the fall) no-one can deny the incredible beauty all around us in the natural world.

The Intellectual Realm: God has blessed all of us with a degree of understanding and knowledge. We see that around us in the great endeavours of mankind and we quite rightly see these as great intellectual achievements. That we can discern much of the nature of the universe around us and the intricacies of its working is a testimony to the common grace given by God, to all.

Scripture reminds us that whilst not everyone will acknowledge God, all have some degree of understanding of God given to them.

For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [Romans 1:21]

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. [Acts 17:22-23]

The Moral Realm: Men and Women have a knowledge of right and wrong; we are moral creatures. We may ignore that knowledge, but it is nevertheless there.

Paul talks of those who practice the greatest of sins yet still know right from wrong.

Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. [Romans 1:32]

The Creative Realm: God has given us incredible creative skill, music, painting, sculpting, writing, cooking etc. And he has also given us the ability to appreciate such works of beauty.

The Social Realm: We are social creatures who were designed to relate with one another, and that is also a provision of common grace. After the fall Adam and Eve continued to remain married and in relationship. Their children also started families and their descendants also married and preserved that social structure.

Government is also a gift from God:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. *[Romans 13:1]*

Government was instituted by God after the flood, and the governments, laws, judicial laws, and enforcement agencies exist to deter evil actions. Of course, those systems can themselves be corrupted by evil men, however, their provision is a means of providing safety for both the believer and the unbeliever.

Whilst we have said Common Grace is not sufficient for salvation it can be a means by which people realise their failing and come to a try saving knowledge of God.

4.3 Calling

Calling can be described as the gracious act of God whereby he invites sinners to accept the salvation that is offered in Christ Jesus.

When Paul talks of those God 'predestined', and also 'called' he is pointing to a specific order of events in the outworking of God's purposes. What is being talked of here is an 'effective calling' rather than a more general 'gospel call' which is a phrase we often use when preaching the gospel.

4.3.1 General Calling

We can talk firstly of a general calling (**a Vocio Realis**) that comes to all people. This is a calling to repentance and faith as evidence by creation and a knowledge of God that even unbelievers possess. This general calling however is not sufficient to bring people to salvation.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above[a] proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun. [Psalm 19:1-4]

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us. [Acts 17:26-27]

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [Romans 1:19-20]

General calling can be viewed in a similar way to common grace (which we saw when looking at the attributes of God) – which extends to all people but does not result in salvation.

4.3.2 The Gospel Call

As Christians we are charged to 'call' people to the gospel. The Great Commission shows this as an imperative and Paul clearly states without this people will be unable to believe in God.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." [Matthew 28:19-20]

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?[a] And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [Romans 10:14]

There are four key aspects to any gospel call:

- a) All have sinned [Rom 3:23]
- b) The penalty for sin is death [Rom 6:23]
- c) Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins [Rom 5:8]
- d) There needs to a response in repentance and faith (Matt 11:28-30)

Clearly however, not all will respond to the gospel call.

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned, [Mark 16:15-16]

¹⁴ For many are called), but few are chosen. [Matthew 22:14]

The gospel call is often rejected but this does not diminish its importance. It is the means chosen by God, to bring men and women to salvation.

4.3.3 Effective Calling

And so, when we talk of calling in the absolute sense of God irrevocably calling people to salvation we talk of 'Effective Calling' (**a Vocio Verbalis**). God's effective call is a powerful call. It is like the summons of a king such that it is not possible to resist or oppose that call. When someone 'calls' us we can chose to respond or not, not so with the effective call of God, it is an act of God that works a change in us. It is a call that guarantees a response.

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. [Romans 8:30]

All who were called were also justified.

The story of the conversion of Lydia is helpful in illustrating this:

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. [Acts 16:13-14]

Paul, Timothy and Silas give the gospel call: (we sat down and began to speak)
 God 'effectively called Lydia: (The Lord opened her heard)

There are a number of specifics regarding this calling. Believers are:

<i>Called out of darkness into light</i>	[1 Peter 2:9]
<i>Called into fellowship with the son</i>	[1 Corinthians 1:9, Acts 2:39]
<i>Called into God's kingdom and glory</i>	[1 Thessalonians 2:12, 1 Peter 5:10, 2 Peter 1:3]
<i>Called to belong to Jesus</i>	[Romans 1:6]
<i>Called to be saints</i>	[Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2]
<i>Called to a realm of peace</i>	[1 Corinthians 7:15, Colossians 3:15]
<i>Called to freedom</i>	[Galatians 5:13]
<i>Called to a hope (i.e., a certainty)</i>	[Ephesians 1:18, 4:4]
<i>Called to holiness</i>	[1 Thessalonians 4:7]
<i>Called to patient endurance</i>	[1 Peter 2:20-21, 1 Peter 3:9]
<i>Called to eternal life</i>	[1 Timothy 6:12]

4.3.4 Historical Viewpoints on 'calling'

Before leaving the subject of 'calling' it is appropriate to consider some historical viewpoints and to return to the gospel call, which we stated earlier was not always sufficient to bring people to salvation, and ask how we reconcile that with a well-known verse from Isaiah.

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. [Isaiah 55:11]

Theologians have often considered, and sought to address the question; “why is the gospel call not always sufficient?

Pelagius (354 AD – 420 AD) said man ultimately has free will to accept or reject the gospel. (We will come back to Pelagius when we look at predestination) however his view was man’s free will was the ultimate driving force – more powerful even than God’s desire to save. God desires to save all and gives a call to save all but that calling is not necessarily sufficient because man ultimately has the free-will option to respond to or reject that calling.

Augustine (354 AD – 430 AD) said God ultimately chooses to call some and not others, and so the call is always fully effective it is just that some are not called (again an idea we will return to when looking at predestination).

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) spoke strongly about the effectiveness of the gospel call, but this was probably influenced by his desire to counter the Anabaptist view that focussed on the inner revelation of the Holy Spirit (which was good) but which was being emphasised so strongly that it was almost denying the power of the written or spoken word.

John Calvin (1509 – 1564) He stated that the gospel call is not in itself effective. But it is made effective by the operation of the Holy Spirit when he savingly applied that gospel call to the hearts of men.

It is this ‘operation of the Holy Spirit’ that we can affirm will never return to God void.

Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism would see the *Vocatio Verbalis* (the word of God) as coming to men and women through the sacraments (communion & baptism) such that these activities are more important than the verbal preaching of the word.

4.4 Regeneration

Regeneration can be described as the act of God whereby he imparts new spiritual life to us.

When Jesus taught Nicodemus in John 3, he spoke of being born again.

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again[a] he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. [John 3:3-5]

A number of Greek words are used to convey this idea.

<i>Palingenesia (regeneration)</i>	<i>[Matthew 19:28, Titus 3:5]</i>
<i>Gennao / Anothē / Anagenēo (to bear, or give birth)</i>	<i>[John 1:13, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 John 2:29]</i>
<i>Apokueo (to bring forth)</i>	<i>[James 1:18]</i>
<i>Ktizo (to create)</i>	<i>[Ephesians 2:10]</i>
<i>Kainē Ktisis (a new creation)</i>	<i>[2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15]</i>
<i>Kainos Anthropos (a new man)</i>	<i>[Ephesians 4:24]</i>

Whilst we must act in regard to repentance and turning from our sins, the actual act of regeneration.

4.4.1 Regeneration is an act of God.

Whilst we must act in regard to repentance and turning from our sins, the actual act of regeneration is fully an act of God. Just as we had not part (or say) in our own natural births, so we are totally passive with regards to regeneration.

This act was prophesied about by Ezekiel.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. [Ezekiel 36:26-27]

In some instances Regeneration has been confused with simply the 'washing away of sin'. It should be noted that such an act would not change our actual nature whereas regeneration clearly involves the idea that we are now new beings.

4.4.2 Regeneration is a work of the Trinity.

<i>The Father:</i>	<i>[Ephesians 2:5 Colossians 2:13]</i>
<i>The Son:</i>	<i>[1 Peter 1:3]</i>
<i>The Holy Spirit:</i>	<i>[John 3:8]</i>

4.4.3 Regeneration precedes Repentance.

If we think of what would seem a natural order of events we would initially expect that Regeneration followed after Repentance i.e., we hear the gospel and respond and as a result of our faith we are 'born again' as God gives us this new heart.

However, as with most things, we are not the instigators, rather God is at work in a way beyond that which we would initially imagine. Regeneration comes first in that God causes us to be born again and so be receptive to the gospel so that we can hear the word and respond. Without the new birth coming first the gospel call would not have any impact on us; it would not reach our heart of stone.

As odd as it might seem to put regeneration first it shows the enormity of God's love and grace. Just as with the cross in that 'While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' So, with salvation in that "while we were still unresponsive to the gospel God caused us to be born again so that we might respond.

At the very least, and there are many verses to support this view, Regeneration and Repentance go hand in hand; as we hear the word so God causes us to be born again – not because we have responded but so that we can respond.

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.
[James 1:18]

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— [Ephesians 2:4-5]

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. [1 Peter 1:3]

4.5 Conversion (Repentance and Faith)

Conversion can be described as the process by which we willingly respond to the gospel call, by sincerely repenting of our sins and placing our trust in Christ Jesus alone for salvation, Conversion means 'turning' and through repentance we 'turn' from sin, and through faith we 'turn' to Christ.

As we have seen already God firstly 'regenerates' us (gives us a new spiritual nature) that enables us to respond to the gospel.

4.5.1 Saving Faith

The term 'saving faith' is often used to ensure clarity on exactly what is required for conversion, as opposed to some other measure of faith or trust which in itself is not sufficient.

Having a knowledge of Christ alone is not sufficient although of course, some knowledge of what Christ has done for us is necessary.

Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. [Romans 1:32]

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! [James 2:19]

Approving (or agreeing with the facts about Jesus) are not sufficient.

This man came to Jesus[by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." [John 3:2]

Nicodemus understood exactly who Jesus was, but this did not equate to saving faith. For this very reason the verses following are where Jesus explains that even with this knowledge and with the 'approval', Nicodemus still had to be 'born again' and come to saving faith.

There must be a personal decision to depend on Jesus. Saving faith is when that knowledge and approval is joined to a sincere and personal trust in Jesus to save the individual.

This aspect of personally trusting in Jesus is very important as both 'belief' and 'faith' whilst having a very clear meaning scripturally, have a somewhat different meaning in today's language. I can believe Paris is the capital of France or that 3 time 5 is 15 but I have no real commitment to those facts (I might think differently if I were French)! But even so I am not depending on anyone to makes those facts real to me. I can **believe** in something without being dependent on it.

Likewise, today, faith has come to mean an irrational belief in something. My football team might lose every match they play but I still have 'faith' and irrational belief that they will win the cup. I can have **faith** in something that is actually an irrational.

Trust therefore is more helpful and closer to the actual scriptural meanings of both belief and faith. The more we know a person the more we are able to trust them.

Many scriptures talk of a closeness by which we are 'in' or 'come into' Christ.

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]

John doesn't say 'whoever believes him' but 'whoever believes *in* him'.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." [John 7:37]

Again, not just 'believe me', but 'come to me'.

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." [Matthew 11:28-30]

All of these verses suggest an intimacy far greater than just intellectual belief.

4.5.2 Repentance

As we have said already Repentance is a turning from sin. Faith and Repentance are inextricably linked – we turn to Christ and from sin – we cannot do one and not the other.

As with Faith, repentance is more than just an intellectual knowledge. It is not sufficient to be sorry for our sins – even genuinely sorry, we have to do something.

As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. [2 Corinthians 7:9-10]

'Being sorry' is not enough – what is required is sorrow that leads to repentance.

Some have argued we only need to turn to Christ for Salvation and that a 'turning from sin' comes later. They would argue that insisting people turn from sin amounts to a gospel of works – you are saved by something you do. Such a view would suggest we only need to accept Christ as Saviour and not as Lord and as such should be rejected, but it is something that has been proposed.

Perhaps the easiest way to counter this is to use a very simple example. If I am facing East, I can make a decision to turn and face West. In turning to face West, I am no longer facing East. I cannot decide to face West, and then at some later point decide that I no longer wish to face East, the two are inextricably linked.

Clearly our turning from sin is not an instant act (as we shall see when we look at Sanctification) but should a Christian exhibit no change in their attitude towards sin then we can rightly question whether they have truly accepted Jesus.

4.6 Justification

4.7

Justification, as a subject will be covered in more detail in the next session when we look at the Doctrine of the Cross, however it is valid to look at it here as well.

The previous five points could loosely be grouped together under the heading of; **How does God bring us to Himself?**

And we have seen he has pre-destined us, he has called us, he has revealed himself to us via his Common Grace, he has called us, he has caused us to be born again (regenerated) so that we might turn to him in repentance.

The next two points might be grouped under the heading of; **What does God now do for us right now?**

And we will look at how in an instant we are Justified, and Adopted

And then the final points group together under the heading of; **How does God cause us to grow and ultimately bless us?**

And these are either events that happen in the future or happen over the course of our Christian life.

Justification can be described as an instantaneous legal act of God by which he declares our sins to be forgiven, Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and therefore that we are righteous in his sight.

We have seen already that God is a just God.

"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. [Deuteronomy 32:4]

And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none besides me. [Isaiah 45:21b]

And as a just God, he must declare us guilty. To ignore our sin or declare us innocent in the face of contrary evidence would be against His very nature as shown by His opinion of false human judges.

who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right! [Isaiah 5:23]

He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord. [Proverbs 17:15]

And the Psalmist sums up our situation very clearly.

Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you. [Psalm 143:2]

The problem we face is very clear. If God is just and righteous; honour bound to return a guilty verdict on mankind how can He forgive us and still remain just? Punishment is demanded for our transgressions.

Yet by definition Justification can be described as that act of God by which a sinner, who is responsible for his guilt and under condemnation, through his belief in Christ Jesus is pronounced by God as Just and Righteous and consequently acquitted.

It is important to note that the scriptural use of Justification is to pronounce or declare righteousness or innocence, not necessarily to make righteous; Justification is a declarative statement by God.

As already noted, we will consider this subject in more detail in the next session.

4.7 Adoption

Adoption can be described as an act of God whereby he makes us a member of his family.

As Christians we are adopted by God; we are now part of God's family; he is our father and we are his sons and daughters.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

[John 1:12]

There are many benefits to adoption in the same way as there are benefits to adoption in purely human terms.

We can speak to and relate to God as a loving father

[Matthew 6:9]

We can experience and know God's love for us

[1 John 3:1]

We are recipients of 'good gifts'

[Matthew 6:32]

We are heirs and fellow heirs with Christ

[Galatians 4:7, Romans 8:17]

We have an eternal inheritance

[1 Peter 1:4]

We receive and are led by the Holy Spirit

[Romans 8:14]

We receive discipline (God is treating us as sons)

[Hebrews 12:5-6]

We share in the suffering and glory of Christ

[Luke 24:26]

We are brothers with fellow Christians in 'one family'

[Romans 1:13, 1 Corinthians 1:10]

We are imitators of God

[Ephesians 5:1]

Although Adoption is a privilege that comes to us when we are converted (as with Justification) it is nevertheless distinct from Justification. It is also distinct from our Regeneration.

With Regeneration God made us spiritually alive. He could have made us spiritually alive but not adopted us into his family – Angels are a good example of this.

This is part of the reason scripture makes it clear that we are superior in the created order to Angels.

Do you not know that we are to judge angels?

[1 Corinthians 6:3a]

With Justification God gave us a right standing before him, but he could have done this without adopting us into his family.

Regeneration is to do with our spiritual life.

Justification is to do with our standing before god's law.

Adoption is to do with our relationship with God.

4.8 Sanctification

Sanctification can be described as a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and more like Christ in our daily lives.

Sanctification is a progressive work (it does not take place at once but over time), it is also a work in which God and man co-operate. The differences between Sanctification and Justification are shown below:

Justification	Sanctification
Legal Standing	Internal Condition
Once for all time	Continuous through our lives
Entirely God's work	We co-operate with God
We are now perfect	We are not perfect
The same for all Christians	Greater in some than in others

Whereas Regeneration, Conversion, and Adoption are a single act, Sanctification is a process; a process that will take the rest of our lives. While we live as fallible human beings in a fallen world we will never be fully free from sin, however we should expect to see a continual growth or change in our natures as we become more like Christ.

We can consider sanctification as consisting of three phases.

4.8.1 A beginning at Regeneration

A definite moral change occurs at our conversion. We cannot continue in sin as a habit or a pattern of life.

he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. [Titus 3:5]

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. [1 John 3:9]

And in this sense Sanctification can be talked of almost as a complete act so that we are dead to sin and it no longer has dominion over us.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. [1 Corinthians 6:11]

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. [Acts 20:32]

We are no longer slaves to sin, but of course we will still sin.

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. [Romans 6:11 & 14]

However, this should be seen as an initial step which has to now be continued and developed.

4.8.2 An Increase throughout our lives

Although we have been set free from sin we are challenged to recognise it still remains and not to let It reign in us.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. [Romans 6:12-13]

And here now is the main meaning of Sanctification; throughout our lives we are growing more like Christ.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.[b] For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. [2 Corinthians 3:18]

and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. [Colossians 3:10]

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [Hebrews 12:1]

If we see this simply as something we must achieve in our own strength we will fail. God will point out areas in our lives where we need to grow and change and in these instances we need to pray for his strength, and we need to share with others so they can support and encourage us.

Routes to sanctification

<i>Bible Reading & Meditation:</i>	[Psalm 1:2, Matthew 4:4, John 17:17]
<i>Prayer:</i>	[Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6]
<i>Worship:</i>	[Ephesians 5:18-20]
<i>Witnessing:</i>	[Matthew 28:19-20]
<i>Acts of Mercy & Justice:</i>	[Matthew 23:23, James 1:27]
<i>Fellowship:</i>	[Hebrews 10:24-25]
<i>Self-Discipline & Control:</i>	[Galatians 5:23 Titus 1:8]

Sanctification affects the whole person – it is not just that we act more Christ like

<i>If affects our intellect (our knowledge of God is changed)</i>	[Colossians 3:10 Philippians 1:9]
<i>It affects our emotions (we grow in love, joy , peace etc)</i>	[Galatians 5:22]
<i>If affects our will (we desire to do what God wants more)</i>	
<i>If affects our spirit (we are spiritually clean)</i>	[2 Corinthians 7:1 1 Corinthians 7:34]
<i>If affects our physical bodies</i>	[1 Thessalonians 5:23]

4.8.3 A Completion at Death

Because sin remains in our bodies we are only ever fully sanctified at death.

who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. [Philippians 3:21]

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall[a] also bear the image of the man of heaven. [1 Corinthians 15:49]

It is important to stress that Sanctification is never complete in this life.

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. [Matthew 5:48]

Some have said God would not give this command without giving the ability to obey it. However, scripture does not bear that out. God commands all people to obey his moral law and holds them accountable when they fail to obey it even though they are unredeemed and dead in their trespasses and sins. The command 'be holy as I am holy' shows the absolute standard that God requires. Our failure to meet that does not mean he must lower his standard, or that he will make us perfect moral creatures, but rather shows the need for him to reach out in love and grace towards us.

No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. [1 John 3:6]

This literally means no one will continue to sin in a habitual and systematic way.

Indeed, the Bible teaches very plainly we cannot be perfect.

If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin— [1 Kings 8:46a]

In fact, the more sanctified we become the more we realise our need of sanctification. Two of the most moral people in the Old Testament still recoiled in horror when they entered the presence of God.

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent[a] in dust and ashes." [Job: 42:5-6]

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" [Isaiah 6:5]

4.9 Perseverance and Assurance

Perseverance means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have truly been born again.

Another, simply way of exploring this subject is to ask the question; "can a Christian ever lose their salvation?"

Various passages stress the point that once we are saved God will keep us and give us the strength to persevere to the end:

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." [John 6:40]

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will 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 the Father's hand. [John 10:27-29]

Those who would argue that it is possible for a Christian to lose their salvation would comment on this verse that whilst none can 'snatch us out of God's hand' we still have free will to remove ourselves from his hand. However, the no-one of the verse has to mean no-one including the person themselves, otherwise the verse is robbed of both its strength and meaning.

The 'they shall never perish' in v28 is a very emphatic word in the Greek and literally means they shall certainly not perish forever. There are many other verses that stress this principle.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. [John 5:24]

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. [1 John 5:13]

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. [Romans 8:30]

The very principle behind this session is that there is a 'chain' a process whereby our salvation occurs. Romans 8:28-30 stress the power and certainty of God's purpose; it is not suffixed by a "but all this fails if we decide to no longer follow Christ!"

So how then do we interpret the many verses that suggest our salvation is conditional and whilst some will endure, some may not?

And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. [Matthew 10:22]

he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. [Colossians 1:22-23]

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, [John 8:31]

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

[Hebrews 3:14]

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

[Hebrews 3:12]

And so, we have two sets of apparently contradictory verses; on the one hand we are told very clearly that all who believe will be saved, then we are told 'if we continue' and 'if we hold firm', we will be saved.

To reconcile these we need to understand the group of people that all these verses are being aimed at.

This second set of verses are **not** aimed at Christians to cause them to worry or to fear that they might at some point in the future fall away and lose their salvation. Such a use denies the strength of the first set of verses that talk of our clear assurance that will be endure – not because of our strength but because of God's. Nor are the verses intended to compel us to into activity such that we seek 'hold on' or 'endure' in our own strength for that takes us straight back to a gospel of good works.

These verses are aimed at those **who are not** Christians and warns them that if they fall away then that will be a sign that they had not fully and truly been born again.

We need to remember that we have no right to make judgements on people's standing before God. We might believe someone is a Christian or not, but we cannot truly know that – only God can. We have many guidelines in scripture – and enduring on the faith is one – but these still do not give absolute certainty. By the same token we might believe that someone is not a Christian but that is not our place to make that judgement – only God can.

And so, all the writers of these verse are writing to a church audience where the likelihood is that all are not saved. They want to teach the correct biblical doctrine that there is an assurance of salvation, but how can that say that to a church where not all are saved and so give a false hope to some? They do so by these verses that say 'if you fall away' it shows you were **never** truly saved. It is not that you had salvation and then lost it, you never had it in the first place.

This is very hard for us for we simply cannot know where people are at, and our perceptions may not be a true reflection of what God knows and sees in their hearts.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

[1 John 2:19]

So let us consider how different people can respond, or not, to the gospel:

- **Some make a true profession of faith**

Some, indeed, many, make a true profession of faith, and it is these that God gives an assurance to that he will keep them to the end.

We can equally argue that the work of Christ on the cross was a complete work. We will see more of this in the next session. Yet if it were possible for someone to have salvation and then to lose it we would have to conclude that Christ died for someone who did not ultimately receive the benefit of that sacrifice. This would make Christ's sacrifice less than perfect and so rob the cross of much of its power.

Those whom Christ died for will enjoy fellowship with him for eternity.

- **Some never respond**

The Bible makes it clear that not everyone will be saved.

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy[a] that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. [Matthew 7:13-14]

However, we must always view this doctrine through the filter of God's grace. There is much here we do not fully understand, and in those instances we must trust in God to be generous and gracious and to stand firm on verses that declare God's universal desire for all people to come to him.

So it is not the will of my[a] Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.. [Matthew 18:14]

We can never know the decision that someone makes in their last moments of life.

The grace of God is found between the saddle and the ground [Irish Proverb]

Ultimately those are the only two options available. When Christ returns all of humanity will be divided into two groups: those who responded to the gospel message, and those who did not, but for where we are now, we need to dig a bit deeper because what we see is not so clear cut. Certainly, we can see other 'groups' of people and to what extent can we have assurance of their salvation?

- **Some can make an outward profession without any true meaning**

It is possible to simply say the words of a prayer of repentance, but for there not to have been a real heart change.

And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. [Luke 8:13-14]

There was no 'root' there was no connection to the source of life.

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 will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' [Matthew 7:22-23]

God does not say "I once knew you but no longer do because you fell away." He says; "I never knew you." There was no initial birth.

- **Some can display many outward signs of conversion and faith**

Again, this is so hard for us because we cannot see into someone's heart as God can, and outward appearance can be deceptive.

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. [Hebrews 6:4-6]

This is in many ways an unsettling passage for us; here we have people who have clearly shown evidence of conversion and walking with and experiencing God. The writer describes people who know, and have experienced something of the power of God; they have been moved by the word, they have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, possibly even moved in spiritual gifts, they may be serving in the fellowship, and yet they fall always and the conclusion must be, as much as those outward signs suggested a re-birth, the failure to persevere indicates a harsher truth that there was no re-birth.

How should we respond to such as passage?

As we have already said, these are not verses to cause us, as **Christians** to fear we might have in some made an insufficient response. They are to warn those who are **not Christians** there is a danger they because they have not fully responded, might fall.

Later we will see the 'signs' that give an assurance that we will persevere, but how should be interpret these verses especially as we cannot help but apply them to others. Is it 'impossible' for these people to be bought back to repentance? No!

Firstly: some, as we have already said have never truly been born again, and so the offer of repentance and forgiveness still stands; is always open. They may have displayed more evidence than just an outward expression shown by the first group, but ultimately their position is the same – the difference is just the degree of response they have shown. And as with that first group they cannot lose a salvation they never had in the first place. Our response and prayer should be that God will still break through and bring them to a place of true repentance. What makes it hard for us, and what this passage is really speaking is the question of "what is left them to bring this person to repentance?" It is hard to see what will work almost to the extent that we might say it is 'impossible.' If we tell them prayer works, they will agree. If we speak of the power of the Holy Spirit, they will agree, there is no other revelation that can be given. In one sense there are not more options and so the writer says 'it is impossible' but again 'for God – nothing is impossible. And for people who have experienced much of God's power but have still not made that final breakthrough we must rest on his grace to bring them to a true and proper knowledge of himself.

God will bless the seed that has been sown – even if in our eyes it is taking a long time to come to fruition.

Secondly; some have genuinely repented, and displayed the power of God in their lives. We need to remember that 'backsliding' is a real and regrettable aspect of life, but God is a God who can rescue from the deepest pit. People can fall away for many reasons; hurt, hardship, disappointment and indeed sin can all cause people to no longer 'appear' to be walking with God., however in many cases they never lose their spiritual awareness and retains some desire to return to the Lord. It is this that we must hold onto and pray into when faced with such circumstances.

Each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. [1Corinthians 3-13-15]

Many may be ultimately saved but with little reward for their lives.

So, what then are the signs that we have truly repented and therefore can be assured of our salvation?

- **A present trust in Christ for Salvation**

This is not trusting in something that happened years ago but being able to give a positive response to the question: If you were to die tonight are you convinced you would go to heaven.

- **A dependency on grace not on works**

If God were to ask why you should be allowed in heaven would your response be because of the trust you have in Christ to have paid the price for your sins – rather than a dependency on your own good character or works.

- **Evidence of the Regeneration work of the Holy Spirit**

Are we displaying the fruit of the Holy Spirit?

- **Evidence of long-term spiritual growth**

Change can happen in different degrees in different people, but we should all be able to point to a development in our Christian walk and give examples of spiritual growth.

Note, these are all 'signs' They give evidence of, but not all are even necessary (the thief on the cross would have had a present trust in Christ and a basic understanding that he was saved through grace and not works, but he would have had no time to display the fruit of the Holy Spirit or to show any long-term growth.

These 'give evidence' of our salvation, and by the same token if we are unable to affirm these the correct response is to seek God and a closer walk with him.

4.10 Glorification

Perseverance can be described as the final step in the process of redemption. It will happen when Christ returns and raises from the dead the bodies of all believers from all time who have died, and along with those believers still alive, gives them perfect resurrection bodies like his own.

Christ redeemed our whole beings, and this means bodies as well as souls.

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. [Romans 8:30]

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. [1 Corinthians 15:51-52]

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [1 Thessalonians 4:14-17]

Whilst the idea of glorification is more clearly described in the New Testament, there are still many verses in the Old Testament that speak of this, and many who looked to God, looked to the ultimate renewal of their physical bodies.

<i>Abraham</i>	[Hebrews 11:19]
<i>Job</i>	[Job 19:25-26]
<i>Isaiah</i>	[Isaiah 26:19]
<i>Martha</i>	[John 11:23-24]

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the dry bones can also be interpreted as a vision of ultimate resurrection and glorification.

What then will our resurrection bodies be like – what does it mean to be glorified?

- **Our bodies will not perish**

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. [1 Corinthians 15:42]

Our bodies will not grow old or weary. There will be no sign of aging. Just as Adam and Eve were created as mature adults, we can imagine our bodies will be that of mature manhood or womanhood. There will be no signs of injury or infirmity.

- **Our bodies will be raised 'in power'**

It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. [1 Corinthians 15:43]

Whilst we will not have the infinite power of God, or the un-natural or super-human power of fictional superheroes, we will have the power and ability that our bodies were designed for.

- **Our bodies will be spiritual**

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.
[1 Corinthians 14:44]

This does not mean our bodies are non-physical; spiritual is not the opposite of physical, but rather this mean our bodies are in tune with the spiritual nature of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Our new bodies are responsive to his will in a way our current bodies never could be.

Questions for consideration

- If you

Further Reading

Deeper Truth