

The theology of salvation in Ephesians

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Preacher: Philip Wells and others

[0:00] I'd like us to spend a few minutes this evening, if you've got the energy for it, meditating, thinking about the theology of salvation, what it is to be saved, how people are saved.

! And you might say, well, that's perfectly straightforward. I don't think it is. In some ways, it is perfectly straightforward. But in other ways, it's easy to get it muddled up. And I think it would be good to remind ourselves of exactly what the Bible does say on this subject.

And it actually leads us into quite deep truths, as you will have noticed from the passage that we read. So, up on the screen, does it say theology of salvation? In other words, being saved.

And so, I'd like us to do this together. If it goes too slow, just look even more bored. If it goes too fast, look puzzled. And I might get the message.

But my wife says I'm never very good at getting messages like that. And I'd like us to think, as we go through, whether what we are seeing refers to a crisis, so something that just takes place in a really big moment, or whether it's something that takes place with a process, so it's just something that gradually goes on and you're never quite sure whether you've arrived at it.

[1:30] And also to think whether what the Bible is describing is something which is basically from earth, so a human process and nothing more than that, or something which is from heaven, or whether there's something of both in there, and if so, what is there of both?

You will have noticed, even in the reading, chapter 2, verse 8, said that there's something which is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Did you notice that?

So, at least something in that text, it says, not from earth, but from heaven. At least something in that text is not of yourselves, it is from heaven.

So, I'd like to begin by asking you what phrases people use when they're talking about people being saved.

So, I started off with one, people say, so-and-so, I got saved, or so-and-so got saved. And there's actually quite a number of expressions that people use. Anybody like to shout out? Pardon?

[2:53] Thank you. Born again. Would I be right in saying that, did Billy Graham write a book called How to Be Born Again?

Did he? I somehow in my mind link Billy Graham with that phrase, but Billy Graham was an American evangelist who was prominent in the 1960s and around then.

Other suggestions? Born again? Finding Jesus. Finding Jesus. Okay. So, people say, I found Jesus.

Thank you. Any other suggestions? If you were asked about seeing the light, yes.

Yes. Yes. Converted. Conversion.

[3:51] Yes. Converted. So, converted is the passive. So, that's something that happens to you. Or sometimes people say, I converted, which would be the positive.

You could say people are a convert. And, of course, it is a convert conversion to something. Converted to Christianity. Converted to Christ. Thank you. Converted to knowledge of God. Knowing God.

Okay. Knowing God. Meeting God. Yeah. Meeting God. Finding the truth.

Finding the truth. Yes. Any more for any more? I got some.

[4:58] Giving my life to the Lord. People would say, you need to give your life to the Lord. Or, I have given my life to the Lord. Came to know the Lord.

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Turning to Christ.

Turning to Christ. Yeah. Of course, the dismissive one that people would say about people like us is, they got religion.

That's what people would say. They suddenly got religion in a dismissive way. Okay. That'll do for a list just to get us going.

And, is there any of those that you would say, I really would not like to think of Christianity in any shape or form under that way of speaking?

[6:09] Any of those completely out of order? I mean, I think they got religion, I would probably, I would not. So, let's scrub that one out for the purposes this evening.

If we look at those other ones, which we say we're reasonably happy with, would they tend to emphasize the idea of a crisis?

So, it's one thing that happens decisively. Or, would they tend to emphasize the idea of a process? So, it's a sort of a journey, and perhaps you get there, and perhaps you spend a long time traveling. I think it's both. You think it's both? Okay. And of that list, of that list, which ones sort of tend to point out the crisis side of it?

Because I would say born again points that out. Although, we know that being born is not an instant thing. It takes time, doesn't it, in human life. There's the process of conception, and then, well, it takes more sometimes.

[7:15] It takes less time, doesn't it? But that tends to be in the nature of a crisis. Do you? Yeah, go on. Well, I just think, from personal experience, you're sort of born again, and you come to know a little bit about Jesus, and all the things that he talks about in the Bible.

For instance, things like forgiveness, acceptance, freedom from sin, and all those sort of things. So, when you start actually, when you wasn't born again, when you was alive before, without Christ, you sort of had, you had a lot of baggage, and you were living in a place where that wasn't.

But as you get to know Christ, it becomes, it becomes that it is that. So, you're sort of born again.

You shed, you shed all the darkness, if you like, and then you feel born again, because you're like a new person, because all that stuff that was is no longer there.

So, if I were to draw a little diagram of it, and say this is all the baggage and everything like that, and things you learn, and then, boom, it changes. It changes, yeah.

So, we've got a process leading up to a crisis, if you like. It's a process of getting to know Jesus, I think, or reading the Bible, really, and then praying, and then meditating on it, and then going, oh, really?

[8:55] Okay. So, but would you say that it's legitimate to say, today I'm born again, you know, at such and such a point, say, I know I'm born again, and yesterday, or ten years ago, I wasn't, but now I am, and there's been a step change somewhere.

Yeah. Yeah, there's definitely been a step change. Before I was in condemnation, and now I'm not.

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, thank you. Would any of, would any of, anybody like to comment on any of those other ways of speaking?

Yeah, conversion, it... Converted is a crisis word. Conversion is a crisis word. The nearest thing in the Bible to conversion is turning or repentance. So, it is that you're going in one direction, and you must turn around and go back in the other direction.

So, I think what I would say, just to sort of, not let that, those thoughts go on too long, is that Bible people will be very much on the idea that you, there's two states, you're either not a Christian or you are a Christian, and you need to transfer from being not a Christian to being a Christian.

It's not like learning a language. In learning a language, you start off and you grow, and you maybe never get to learn it precisely, and there's not really a moment where you say, today, I can speak Portuguese, yesterday, I couldn't speak Portuguese.

[10:43] Do you see what I mean? It's just a never-ending process, but becoming a Christian, in that sense, isn't a never-ending process. There's a moment where I say, this is, there was a moment when I was not born again and I became born again.

Would you go along with that sort of way of looking at it? Jack? Jack? I'm looking at you because you're going... Let's have...

Yeah, there is, there's like a gestation process, isn't there? Yeah, I think for some people, there is an identical moment where they prayed a particular prayer and then everything was different from then.

From other people, there was like a process and they come through it and they say, ooh, look what's happened. So that was my story. When I came to university, I prayed to become a Christian like these other Christians and at the end of my first term, I found that God had made me a Christian like these other Christians and I don't know exactly when that happened, but there was a process.

But let's look in Ephesians 2 because we've been thinking how we think of it and we always need to ask the question, have we got this right from the Bible?

[12:14] Is this the way the Bible thinks of it? So let's simply go through these verses in chapter 2, verses 1 to 10 and see what they say. So I've got a little blank sheet up on the screen here which says before, after, and the transition going from what I used to be to what I am now.

How does that happen? And I think it's just worth noting that Paul uses we and you in this. And he says that the we, most of the time, is he's talking about himself as a first generation Jewish believer. And roughly speaking, the you, the people that he's speaking to, are Gentiles who you would not have expected to be Christians.

So do you notice that? He says the we and you. So chapter 1, 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.

And then he goes down, if you go down to verse 13, he said, and you also were included in Christ. So it's just easy to miss that, but that's the background of what he's saying.

[13:37] He's saying the privilege that we have as the first believers, we who are first to believe in Christ, and you also have this privilege too. So it comes to the same thing because whatever he's said about we is also true about you because you also get the same blessings.

But anyway, let's take it verse by verse then. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But, so let's do the bit before the but, what could we say about the, just to see what I'm trying to do, I'm trying to say this is what they were like and this is what they were saved from and this is what happens when they were saved.

So you need to understand both of those. So anybody like to suggest any descriptions of the Ephesians before they were converted? I kind of see a picture of like blind people who are, oh, so I see an image of like blind people who are, not by their own choosing, but by the state that they find themselves in, trying to satisfy their cravings or their desires by looking to things in the world around them, which would be a natural, natural thing to do, an instinctive and, yeah, something that would be, you know, a sensible thing to do almost because, hey, what else is there to do but to try and fulfil the inner cravings that we have within us?

[15:58] So, by looking around what's around to try and fulfil those desires. Thank you very much. Okay. Do you mind if we pick that out a little bit?

So, somebody who is blind and could I just come back on this? So, what did they not choose? Because I wrote that down as you were saying it. So, what did they not choose?

I don't think they chose to be blind. I think, yeah, it's not of their own will to find themselves in this state. It's how they are.

Okay. Thank you very much. Would anybody like to comment on that and tease that out? Nature.

By nature. Okay. So, where are we getting, where are we getting by nature from? Verse 3. We were by nature objects of wrath.

[16:59] So, there's something there about nature. The way we are, the way, so should I put this in, in this area here. By nature.

Actually, it says by nature objects of wrath, doesn't it? Now, let me ask you a question. Do you think if people are by nature this way, is it, in fact, unfair for God to be wrathful towards them if it is their nature to be thus?

Is it unfair for God to be wrathful? Because that's what it says. We were by nature objects of wrath. I think the way, the way we were objects of wrath.

Would you like a, so, the way we are objects of wrath is not, is not sort of, it's also quite a kind thing because, you know, Jesus still gives people food and shelter and money and jobs and warmth, you know, but they, they don't have their inner craving satisfied.

[18:24] So, it's not a wrath where they're getting bombarded and attacked and punished all the time. So, but the fact that God is wrathful, I think, is a just thing because they have, they haven't looked to God and I can, I think that it's a righteous wrathness from God that they haven't looked because he is after all their creator.

Okay, so, so, saying a couple of things there. One, that to say that they're objects of wrath is not all that you can say because human beings such as the Ephesians used to be are also objects of God's mercy because he feeds them, clothes them, looks after them, maybe even hears their prayers if they pray, you know, Lord, save, save my child from death.

So, it's not the only thing that we could say but this question about the, they are by nature objects of wrath. So, I'm just, so you're saying that that is just because I'm sort of picking up on Ross saying they didn't choose to be this.

They didn't, so I think, Ross, you're saying that they didn't, they went in some neutral place and then they said, oh, I'm going to choose to be something.

Can I add something there? Yes. So, these thoughts are from this morning in Sunday Club where they were looking, the children were looking at the flood and the story of the flood and so God looked at the world before the flood and man was so evil and sinful that he decided to wipe them out completely apart from Noah who was not taking part in the sinful nature and so I suppose sin and people following the desires of their heart, if you take that and kind of put it in a real world situation is people murdering each other, people being involved in relationships that end in pain for each other and really terrible terrible things and so the only real end result can be

[20:49] God's wrath because the sinful nature is so bad when it's left alone to yeah yeah thank you so we've got a number of things here I think one thing is you mentioned people murdering one another and going to extremes in sort of bizarre relationships or whatever I don't think Paul is restricting himself just to those who were doing extreme behaviour I think he was saying that even people who perhaps are very civilised yet in their inner motivation and the way they think about the world and thus the way they behave are still objects of wrath because they're not thinking about God they're not doing it for God yeah so that's one thing you mustn't move otherwise I think you're trying to say something breathe completely quietly like this the question

I wanted to ask was here it says that human beings are by nature objects of wrath so you said sinful nature there is something quite so deep in the makeup of humanity as humans now are which in which they're totally coloured by sin that's not to say that being human is itself sinful because being human is noble we're made in the image of God but what we choose to do with that is sinful and so you could say by nature objects of God's disapproval and if we were to say well if it's nature then we can't really be blamed for it I'd invite you to put it around the other way and say did God choose to be holy or is it God's nature to be holy and if it's God's nature to be holy would we say it's pointless to praise him and say how wonderful he is to be holy if he had no real choice about it anyway do you see where I'm going with that that somebody can have such as their nature and that you rightly praise them or blame them and that's a perfectly right thing to do we do it with

God that way round he's always holy there's never been a time when he wasn't holy he didn't choose to be holy from some neutral state but we praise him for his holiness and if sinful if sinners are sinners they can rightly be blamed for being sinners even though they never started off in a neutral place and then do you see what I mean I think it works that way around do you see what I mean does that make sense I have to think about that and anyway we could go into the text and say it isn't simply that they passively are in this state because it says in verse 2 those who are

disobedient so although it is nature sinful nature it does not override the will because people are choosing all the time to disobey so we ought to put disobedience in there because it says it am I right so we're if we're dead yeah

I know that we can be disobedient but we can only I mean I think it's just a conundrum I find it inexplicable to work it out but we we're disobedient according to our nature Ross used blindness but Paul says dead and if you're dead you can't change being dead you're just like Lazarus so Lazarus couldn't do anything and there seems to be a fatalistic aspect to it we're in a deep pit and we can't get out of it and though we are disobedient it's because the fact that we're dead we can't not we can't obey yes bound over to disobedience yes yeah

I mean there's various ways of putting it even if we just stick to this text here you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live isn't that what it actually says you were dead and if you had an authorised version it says in your transgressions and sins in which you used to walk when you followed the ways of this world so when it says dead which is what it does say it doesn't mean dead absolutely motionless and like a stone it's if I may use that like a you know an inanimate object but it does mean dead in the we're unable to obey God yeah there's an inability in dead because it doesn't although in other places it says blind here it says dead so unable to respond unable to react in it doesn't mean that we were unable to stop at traffic lights or unable to boil an egg but unable to do any of those things in a way of spiritual life something like that so if I put dead there of course that's the word it uses dead and so there is a real conundrum about the human condition here isn't there and it's not a conundrum which lets people off the hook and says ah well you see they can't help it because they're dead and they it it never lets people off the hook it keeps them on the hook but it says look what a terrible state you're in you are dead you cannot move a spiritual muscle in the right direction you are disobedient you keep on willfully deliberately choosing to go the wrong way this is not partly true of you but this is your nature this is by nature you are what does it say a child of wrath is that right objects of wrath wrath so it puts layer upon layer of the complete pickle that humanity is in and you could add other layers to that the layer of there's a satanic influence as well isn't it you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air the spirit who is now at work and those who are disobedient so we are not alone in this spiritual sphere of sin and death we are we were colleagues with satan following him so you have this sort of trinity don't you the world the flesh and the devil so it's a right old pickle that people are in would anybody like is there anything significant that we've missed out there because we've touched on a lot of those points something about the fact that our nature our sinful natures were not compatible with God's nature like prior to

[29:59] God's work in us there was something fundamentally incompatible that being objects of wrath yeah yeah I think the verse that says that would be more in chapter 4 verse 18 where it says you must no longer live as the gentiles do in the futility of their thinking they are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them so that's not so much incompatibility as a separation so we in our nature are separated from God and not upheld in communion with but separated from does that go a little bit to a way yeah I suppose just given obviously we're going to come on to the bit but because of his great love for us but it would explain something of the desire of God's heart for us not to be separate from him that he does not want us to be objects of wrath but to set his love upon us but yeah okay yes

I have to go and get the microphone so this these verses when I read them I find them really difficult to read because the first four verses and whenever I read them I kind of feel really turned off by them because although I know they're true it's really horrible reading and I think of my life before I knew God and it paints that life with such a horrible brush that I think it's worth I suppose it's worth also not that I want to add to these scriptures but reminding that God did make us in his image and even before people knew before people know the Lord they do wonderful things even in their sinfulness and you know God

God in his mercy like we mentioned earlier people do amazing things don't they even when they don't know the Lord they can create wonderful pieces of music or bring up children in a really loving kind way and they can show great kindness to people just from the heart that God has given them

they can do great acts of philanthropy and charity and so there is a very spiritual element to these verses which is something to do with salvation and the great cosmic picture of salvation that maybe we need to look at it all within that sphere it would be very hard to sit next to somebody in the office if the only information you had about them was that they follow the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air and the spirit who is now working those who are disobedient you would scarcely even dare ask them to lend you a paperclip would you and you wouldn't have the plumber around to fix your boy it would be like well this guy is just going to wreck the whole thing yes so that's absolutely right so this is not all the information we have about the human condition and we could add to that that we're made in the image of God and under

God's what am I trying to say there's a what the theologians call common grace God's goodness to good and evil alike he sends the rain he sends the sun and he holds us back from everything going to an extreme but even having could Steve have the microphone but even having said that that doesn't mean that sin is any less sinful yeah go on Steve I was just going to say that the question is what we haven't really said is what does the phrase the kingdom of the air actually mean it seems to me that it talks about what we sometimes call the zeitgeist the spirit of the age in a sense probably where the phrase comes from but it's a spirit of disobedience isn't it that he's talking about that the that

I mean why does he say the kingdom of the air he must be talking about something you kind of breathe in or you know you exist in because that's where you are that's where you live as it were okay yeah thank you very much let's move on because that's the negative and it is really very negative and I don't think we can get away from that and I suppose one of the things that we would have to humbly say is although we think we understand our sin and although we think we confess sin and sense the guilt of sin we actually need to be educated in this because we don't quite realise how bad it was we don't quite realise how bad sin is until the Bible tells us so so there's that now let's go to the next bit so that was where we were at where do we get to and how do we get there so let's look at the next verses but because of his great love for us

[35:56] God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved and God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus 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 for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do so wonderful sentences I wonder if we can tease any of that where do we go to afterwards and how do we get there so we go to the place of salvation and we get there to make the

God okay so the transition the transition the movement is grace does it say grace and if so where does it say grace by grace verse eight so it just says it in verse eight by grace you have been saved does it say it anywhere else verse five it says by grace you have been saved so verse five does it say anywhere else verse seven verse seven the incomparable riches of his grace so it emphasizes at least those three times we're saved by God's grace does it say that okay because of his great love for us God who is rich in mercy so if we would put mercy in the same heading as grace I don't think they're that different by God's mercy so if I were to ask you can I find my little so rather than the crisis process from earth or from heaven what's he emphasizing here from heaven isn't it he's saying that's the pickle you were in you were so words can hardly describe the catch 22 pickle you were in you just could not get out you did not have the capacity to do so you were just running around again and again disobeying God not thinking about God and God just reached down and picked you out of that by grace he didn't wait for you to say excuse me could you help me! he sort of picture that's the picture that we're given am I right? By grace anybody could we say anything else about either where we get to or how we get there so grace is definitely there from death to life can you give us the life bit please Steve verse five so we were in death that says dead and we go to life you were dead you were made alive any other detail on that you were dead you were made alive with Christ with Christ so here we ought to find room to put Christ in this diagram and I suppose the question is how much room on the diagram should there be for

Christ in this little bit is he a little part of it no he's all of it isn't it this whole area here the whole thing is Christ so that's my assertion would anybody like to back that up with anything from the text so he made us alive with Christ anything else that says anything not from yourselves the gift of God so let's put gift in there as well right so there's the word faith and I think that is over in this side faith verse 8 did faith come into our reading in any other place it's not mentioned a huge amount but I think it was mentioned at one other point it's in chapter 1 actually well 1 verse 13 it actually says believed doesn't it having believed you were marked in him with a seal yes is that right so interestingly there's just those two mentions of faith and believing which I think is probably just the same thing spelt in a different way that

[42:00] I think we would say is a human activity it's not only a human activity but it is a human activity so I nearly said stones again chairs don't have faith it would be ridiculous to say this is a chair that has faith this is a chair that doesn't have faith in and limit objects don't have faith dogs sometimes have faith don't they a dog might trust you in a very simple way which I suppose shows what a simple thing is when we put our trust in God may I share with you an illustration because I've never ever had time to use this but I saw many years ago one of these horse what is it when the horse show thing when horses have to do tasks what's that called it's not a gym car is it that sort of thing and what it was was that they got a seesaw thing quite a big seesaw and such a horse could go on it and they blindfolded the horse and the horse was asked by the rider to go up onto the seesaw and imagine the horse doing this thinking what's all this about and then when it gets to the middle the seesaw tips over and goes down the other side and the horse has to go down here and of course the horse and rider are marked on how panicked they are by this and this always seems to me a wonderful picture of faith because the horse just trusted the rider to know where we were going and even when you got to the point we thought this is a bit peculiar rather than the horse going

I'm not up for this anymore but it's okay and this just seemed to me a wonderful picture of the simple faith that we ought where we're going does he but he does say I'm in charge I know where we're going just follow me on this anyway thank you for allowing me to say that because I saw that years and years ago I never had the opportunity to say it where did we get to faith anything else about so go from death to life in Christ any other things that it says!

yes yeah thank you and does it not say raised with Christ so the heavy lifting on this raising is the heavy lifting of raising Christ from the dead and we are lifted up with him it's not a separate thing from that it is linked up to the fact as he rises from the dead he's got us attached to him if you like clinging on to him and as he's lifted he brings us up with him a bit like a ship being brought up out of the sea with the barnacles attached to it the whole thing gets lifted up and we are raised with Christ 1 verse 19 and 20 the incomparable power for us who believe that power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in

Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated at his right hand did you notice that verse 6 seated us this is chapter 2 verse 6 seated us with him in heavenly realms so I'm sorry really high it is really high we're co-raised with him and co-seated with Christ seated I think this is a great mystery because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead 2000 years ago and ascended into heaven 2000 years ago and has been seated in the right hand of God ever since I wasn't even born 2000 years ago and yet I'm told that in some wonderful way when he was raised up

I was raised too when he was seated at the right hand of God I was seated there with him and how that link works across time I've no idea I don't know I've never read anybody who can tell us that so that link in a sense is there because it's in the eternal purposes of God the link is also there when I come to faith so in verse chapter 1 verse 13 you also were included in Christ when you heard of the word of and believed so there's a link that seems to be in some sense formed when I come to faith but there must be more to it than that because the link existed before I was even born when Christ was raised in some sense I was raised with him does that make some sort of sense and let's we need to draw to a conclusion don't we so in terms of salvation where would you say the emphasis lies on as regards the human activity versus the divine activity where would you say the emphasis

lies in this passage the divine yeah sorry the initiative is with

[48:06] God that's certainly the way it looks at it here isn't it that's not to say that it isn't right for evangelists to pin on people you should believe in Jesus Christ you should believe in him now you have adequate evidence to believe in him you have all the promises believe in him there he is every good thing is in Christ come to Christ you will have every good thing that's you know that's the right thing for evangelists to say but it's also true to say that the emphasis here is that underneath all the human activity is God who takes the initiative when we were dead in trespasses and sins!

he made us alive with Christ which is pretty amazing I think it's meant to be amazing because that's the way Ephesians works it says this is so amazing I'm now going to say you should live as people who are as blessed as that yeah I was going to say that the most powerful thing here well other than God is faith so the hinge so it all comes from heaven but the hinge is faith and belief so what Ray mentioned about the scripture in Ephesians 1 where it mentions believe and it just kind of struck me made me think of Hebrews 11 is it where there's all the great people from the Old Testament and it's their small acts of faith just their kind of the kind of clinging on to what God has promised that kind of brings about huge amazing works by God and it is literally just us just saying yeah I'll be that horse that kind of trusts and then amazing things happen yeah yes we've got what shall I say there's a perspective on this isn't there we are to be people of faith and by faith we are saved so that is the focal point of what is the people to do is believe believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved although if you then zoom back a bit it says you're saved by faith and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God so even the faith oh

I didn't realize that the faith was a gift so faith is a duty and a gift it can be both of those things you must believe and then you say well here I am believing aren't I good actually that was a gift anyway so it's a rather wonderful picture it's humbling we should be humbled and we should be yeah humbling I think is a worshipful attitude to be humbled and say we're amazed at what God has done and who God is time's gone I'm sorry well I'm not sorry I think we've looked at some good things but I didn't!
seem