

# God's Sovereignty and Your Salvation, Part 7

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We're approaching the end of our series on God's sovereignty and your salvation, but we're still in Luke 10. So, if you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 10, which is our launch-pad text for [this] series.

In John Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and Hopeful are traveling to the Celestial City when they encounter a man called Ignorance. Bunyan writes this:

They met with a very brisk lad that came out of that country, and his name was Ignorance. So Christian asked him from what parts he came, and where he was going.

Ignor. Sir, I was born in the country that lies over there, a little on the left, and I am going to the Celestial City.

Chr. But how do you think to get in at the gate, for you may find some difficulty there?

Ignor. As other good people do, said he.

Chr. But what have you to show at that gate, that the gate should be opened to you?

Ignor. I know my Lord's will, and have been a good person; I pay my debts; I pray, fast, pay tithes, and give alms, and have left my country for where I am going.

Chr. But you did not come in at the narrow-gate, that is at the head of this way; you came in over there, through that crooked lane, and therefore I fear, however you might think of yourself, when the reckoning-day shall come, you will have laid to your charge, that you are a thief and a robber, instead of getting admittance into the city.

Ignor. Gentlemen, you are utter strangers to me; I do not know you: be content to follow the religion of your country, and I will follow the religion of mine. I hope all will be well. And as for the gate that you talk of, all the world knows that it is a great distance from our country. I cannot think that any man in all our parts knows the way to it; nor do they need to be concerned that they do or not, since we have, as you see, a fine, pleasant, green lane, that comes down from our country, and runs beside this way.

When Christian saw that the man was wise in his own conceit, he said to Hopeful in a whisper, "There is more hope of a fool than of him." Prov. 26:12. And said, moreover, "When a fool walks by the way, his wisdom fails him, and everyone sees that he is a fool." Eccl. 10:3

And so it is with many people in the world. They are ignorant. They think they're going to heaven, but they're not. I've done quite a few funeral sermons for people who don't know the Lord. Before and after [the service], I talk with people. These are people who never went to church, who never read their Bibles, who had no devotion to God, and yet when their family [or] their friends [who have died] come up, [these people] talk about them being "in a better place," that those people are now in a good place,

they're in heaven, they're with Jesus. I have never heard anyone ever say at a memorial service, or a funeral, "Well, we need to mourn this person because now he's in hell." It is as if heaven is open to all but just the most brutal serial killers.

Yet the exact opposite is true, as we have learned. Jesus Himself said [that] the gate is narrow and the way to heaven is narrow, and few are those who find that gate [see Matthew 7:14]. Jesus made it clear that very many religious people, people who are convinced they are going to heaven, will not end up there, but in hell. Why is that? It's because they, like Bunyan's Ignorance, are themselves ignorant of the truth. They have gotten their gospel from Hollywood, from the media, from stereotypes of how people are to get to heaven, but not from the Bible. They have the false but popular notion that people are, for the most part, good, and if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds in the balance of God's justice, you will get in because, after all, you're not *that bad*.

This is a false notion, that men are saved by being good, or pretty good, or better than a serial killer. As we have seen in previous weeks, men are not good. Men are sinners, men have fallen short of God's holy perfection [see Romans 3:23]. The wrath of God abides on them [see John 3:36] because God demands justice for every offense that is committed. That is why we are doing this series on God's sovereignty and your salvation. We only have one more week to go, I'm sorry to say, but we have to move on—otherwise we'll never finish Luke.

The reason that we're looking at [Luke 10:21–24] and using it as a launch pad for God's sovereignty in salvation is because this text shows, in three distinct ways, that God is in absolute control of who is and who isn't saved. Follow along as I read verses 21–24, and we'll go from there. "At that very time He," that is, Jesus:

rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them

to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” Turning to the disciples, He said privately, ”Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them.”

What has happened here is [that] the seventy disciples have been sent out by Jesus to tour around the country, [going] to cities where Jesus is going to come, [and preaching] the gospel, heal[ing] the sick, and cast[ing] out demons. They come back, and they're really excited, but they're not excited that they got to preach the gospel. They're not excited that people actually got saved. What they're excited about is that the demons [were] subject to them. Jesus says, “Don't be excited about that, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” [see 10:20], and then He says what we just read. Jesus Himself begins to rejoice in three specific things that tell us [that] God is sovereign in salvation. One: God hides the truth from certain people so they can't be saved. Two: God reveals the truth to some people so they can be saved. Three: The only way to know the Father is if Jesus wills for it to happen. All three statements in this text show us that God is sovereign in salvation.

The problem is, though, as we have discussed already (if you weren't here you're just going to have to go back and listen [to the previous sermons] on the Web site or get the CDs<sup>1</sup>), that when you start talking about God's sovereignty in salvation, people begin to say, “Well, wait a second

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now. If God is absolutely sovereign, if He is in complete control, then what about me? What about my having to believe? What about being fair? I mean, what about being just? It just doesn't seem right. Why witness? Why pray?" In the last six [sermons], we have attempted to answer many of those questions. [First], specifically, in relationship to God, after we saw how men were created, how they are sinners, how they are depraved, and [we saw] the consequences of sin, and the barriers inside and outside of men that keep them from salvation and even wanting to come to God for salvation, we learned that God, in eternity past, predestined and elected those who would be saved. We saw that. We looked at many texts on that. Salvation depends on God choosing us before the foundation of the world, and no one will ever be saved unless that happens.

Second, we also learned that at the proper time God sent forth His Son, Jesus, born of a virgin, born under the law, and Jesus lived a perfect life, willingly offered Himself up to die, was crucified, buried, and rose again on the third day. I don't care what [else] happens, you cannot get saved unless God does that for you. Third, we learned that men must repent of their sins and believe in the gospel message—that Jesus died, [was] buried, and rose again—and that only by believing in Him we are saved. If that does not happen, you can't be saved. So, God is in charge of the whole foundation and groundwork of anybody ever being saved.

This creates a paradox because the Scriptures say [that] there are none who seek God, not even one [see Romans 3:11]. Now, if you have to believe in Jesus in order to be saved, and yet no one seeks God, that's a problem. It's also a problem since if you know Christ, if you've given your life to Christ, if you have been saved, you know in your heart that you sought God and you were saved. Yet, the Scriptures say [that] no one seeks Him. People look at that, and [say], "Wait a second here. Is the Bible contradicting itself?" No. We learned that the Bible is teaching us that no one, *on their own*,

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unaided by the grace of God, seeks Jesus. No one. We learned that people who don't know Christ are dead in their sins [see Ephesians 2:1], they love darkness rather than Light, they will not come to the Light lest their deeds should be exposed [see John 3:19–20], they can't understand the truth [see 1 Corinthians 2:14], they can't please God [see Romans 8:8], they don't want to come to Christ, and that's where they are.

[In addition to] that is [the fact that] Satan and the world are against [men], outside of them, trying to hinder them from coming to Christ. We looked at all of that in great detail so that the question is, then: How can anyone ever get saved? If no one is seeking God, then how come all these Christians have sought God and been saved? We gave six answers last week. First, [it is] because God supplies the saving grace and mercy to them. Second, [it is] because the Father draws unwilling sinners to Christ. Third, [it is] because the Holy Spirit illumines them to the truth of the gospel so they can understand the truth. Fourth, [it is] because God grants unbelievers saving faith. [Fifth, it is] because God grants sinners repentance. [Sixth, it is] because God regenerates sinners and causes them to be born again.

It is true that spiritually dead, unwilling sinners, when the grace of God comes upon them, are overwhelmed, their minds are enlightened, they are spiritually quickened from the dead, and they actually want to believe of their own will. They actually see it as the only sane thing to do. It's the only logical thing to do. Now that God has overridden sin and its negative effects and pushed Satan and the world aside so they can see the truth, [sinners say], "Oh, yeah! I want that!" [Then], of their own wills, freed up, repaired, by the grace of God, they believe and are saved. That's how it works.

This is still not the end of the story when it comes to God's sovereignty in salvation, as we will see this week and next. At the time of salvation, or as a consequence of salvation, God continues the sovereignty work in other ways. In fact, an entire chain of sovereign events occurs that happens to save and to keep people saved. So, for this morning, I want to address four

sovereign actions that God performs as a consequence [of], or in response to, saving sinners.

You need to know that these truths will bring you great encouragement if you're a believer. They will motivate you to be thankful because they are incredible. Keep in mind [that] we're talking about believers now, people who have been predestined, drawn by God's grace, who have repented of their sins, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, been born again—whatever you want to say—that's who we're talking about. If you're not saved, if you don't know Christ, if you don't even know what I'm talking about, then this is something that *could* be true of you.

[You need to] realize that any of the four sovereign works of God I'm about to address this morning could be an entire series of sermons. It is so tempting to do an entire series of sermons [on each of them]. I *love* this stuff. But, what I'm going to do is just hit [on] each one, explain it in a clear, understandable way, [discuss] a couple [of] key [Scripture] references, and then we're going to have to move on and close up shop. Trying to do this creates a problem. Have you ever had a new shirt or some new garment, and you see this little thread hanging out? One time, I remember, I had this new tie, and there was this little, tiny, microscopic thread sticking out the end of the tie. I thought, "I'm getting rid of that!" And so, I just grabbed it, and [pulled on it], and my tie wadded up. I was like, "Ah! Ah!" It had this really nasty snag all the way down it. That was because that thread was interwoven [with] and connected to all this other stuff all the way up my tie.

In the same way, when you start talking about doctrines related to salvation, they're all kind of woven together in this salvation tapestry, and if you just grab one of the strings and [say], "Let's look at this one," [and pull on it], what happens is it creates a big snarl. You have to be very artificial in trying to explain one [doctrine] at a time. The problem is [that] I'm unable to explain all of the pieces at one time. I have to separate them, but I want you all to know that all of the doctrines we're going to talk about this morning, and even more the ones we're going to talk about next week, and ones

we're not even going to mention, all relate together. [They] are inextricably connected to one another, and they're all part of what is very important for people to know about salvation. Just keep that in mind.

The first thing we want to talk about is that God sovereignly justifies you. [Imagine that] you're at work one day. It's lunchtime and your stomach is growling. You're thinking, "Man, I'm hungry." So you pop open your wallet, and think, "Oh, I don't have any cash. I have a credit card, but I want to go to my favorite little hole-in-the-wall food stand, and they don't take credit cards." So, you go out, get a gun out of your car, walk over to the bank, and start shooting people. The reason you do that is [because] you know they're not just going to hand you the money. (I know this is kind of grisly, but bear with me.) After slaughtering the people in the bank, you crawl over [the counter], open the teller's drawer, and get \$10 out for lunch.

You walk out the bank door, your gun smoking, you've got your ten bucks in your hand, and about that time the police arrive. They put you under arrest. You're sent to jail, you appear before the judge, and you are guilty. Doesn't it kind of [irk] you when something like that happens, [and] they say on the news, "Somebody is *accused* of. . ." It's like, well, no duh! [You are] guilty! The [bank surveillance] cameras got [you] from eight angles [as you were] robbing and shooting. Firsthand witnesses saw [you] go into the bank with the gun. Firsthand witnesses saw [you] come out of the bank with the smoking gun and the \$10. Some of the people [you] shot didn't die, and they can testify, "That's the guy who shot me." Not only that, you admit it: "I did it. I needed lunch money." OK?

This is how it is with everyone before an infinite, perfectly holy God. He sees you, He sees me, and says, "Guilty beyond a shadow of a doubt." You deserve not only to die physically, but you deserve the second death, a synonym for the lake of fire [see Revelation 20:14]. Why? [It is] because even at birth, we are sinners in Adam. The Scriptures say [that] his sin and guilt were reckoned, or imputed, to us. We're born sinners. Then, when we grow up, we sin because we are sinners. So, we're not only guilty because of what [Adam] did, we're guilty because of what we do. We're doubly

sinners, and since God is all-knowing, He knows everything, He doesn't need any lawyers, He doesn't need any cameras, He doesn't need any expert witnesses. His mind knows all. He knows everything about you, [He] knows every evil thought and deed, [and] everything you've ever done that has been contrary to His perfect, holy nature.

That makes you guilty beyond a shadow of a doubt. There is nothing you can do to bribe God, there is nothing you can do to try and weasel your way out. You can't hire any lawyers, you can't try and do good enough deeds to overwrite your bad ones. His justice is infinite, and the Scriptures say He will by no means allow the guilty to go unpunished [see Exodus 34:7; Nahum 1:3], He will demand that every sin be punished to its *n*th degree. He is going to crush you under the weight of His omnipotent wrath and fury for all eternity because His justice says it must happen. However, there is this loophole, a very desperate loophole, in the law of God. This loophole says, "If somebody is guilty, My justice has to be satisfied—somebody has to pay. [But], I am willing to receive a substitute." There is the law of substitution in the law of God. Why is it desperate? [It is] because all you need is a perfect person who has never sinned in thought or deed all his life, and that perfect person needs to be willing to suffer the wrath of God on behalf of the guilty person. People like that are hard to find.

God says, "If someone like that could be found, and if that person could obey Me perfectly, then I would be willing, if he is willing to suffer My wrath and judgment, to set you free and cause you to be just before Me, and you would be justified." The reason this is such a desperate situation is [that], as I explained earlier, the Scriptures teach that we are not only sinners because we sin, we are sinners because we are sinners in Adam. His sin and guilt are imputed to us. Because we are descended from him and he was the ultimate sinner, the whole human race is cursed. So, you would have to get somebody who didn't have a human father [to be the perfect sacrifice]. That's why the virgin birth happened. That's why Jesus had to be born of a virgin, so that Adam's sin nature would not be imputed, or

reckoned, to Jesus, so that He could be born 100 percent God, 100 percent man, having no sin nature passed down, so He could live a perfect life, [and] so He could willingly offer Himself up as a substitute.

The guilty party is then justified before God when the perfect person is willing, of His own will, to suffer the judgment and penalty that the guilty person deserved. When that happens, God declares the guilty person just. [That] does not mean that the person never sinned. He sinned. It doesn't mean that he is now perfect. He's not perfect. What it does mean is that because he placed his faith in Jesus, God is willing to declare him as if he were just because Jesus paid the penalty on his behalf.

Justification is a legal declaration that one is just before God, [and is therefore] often described as "forensic." We [may] watch shows that talk about "forensics." "Forensic" describes "that which is legally binding in a court of law." So, what justification says is [that] because Jesus suffered and paid the penalty, God legally, before His court of one person—Himself—declares this person to be just, holy, or right because Jesus stood in as the substitute. Justification is amazing not only because of the sin of the sinner being placed on Jesus and [that person's] being declared just, but also because the Scriptures teach that God then takes Jesus' perfect righteousness and imputes it, or reckons [it] to the account of, that guilty sinner. That is what's cool.

Let's look at a couple [of] texts. I want you to know [that] there are tons of [texts about] this in the New Testament, and we're just going to look at couple little ones. The first is Romans 4:5–6. Turn there. If you want to read a lot about justification, you could read Romans 3:21–5:21—it all talks about justification by faith. In Romans 4:5–6, we read this: "But to the one who does not work," just stop there. Notice that justification is not about you doing anything. This is the sovereign work that God does. "But to the one who does not work, but believes," or has faith, "in Him," that is, Jesus, "who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits his righteousness apart from works." Notice here [that] we have somebody

who isn't doing any work. This person is described as "ungodly," [and] this ungodly person places his faith in Jesus, and his faith in Jesus is credited, imputed, reckoned—however you want to say it—as righteousness. Then, just so you know, at the very end, [it says it is imputed] "apart from works." You can't do anything.

Turn over to Philippians 3. This is really great. Here, Paul talks about his privilege. If you don't know anything about Paul, [he] was the ultimate candidate for salvation if it could be by anything in us. He talks about his privilege, nationality, [being] the Hebrew of Hebrews, born of the tribe of Benjamin. "I was trained by Gamaliel, one of the greatest rabbis that ever was. You talk about the right religious connections, I was a Pharisee of Pharisees. I had zeal. I persecuted the Church of God. Man, according to law, I obeyed perfectly." Then, after laying out his whole religious pedigree, he says this starting in [Philippians 3:]7: "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

You're [thinking], "Really? Those things didn't kind of grease your entrance into heaven?"

"No. I count them as loss," [he says]. "More than that, I count all things to be loss." Anything [he] didn't mention is loss "in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish," manure, "so that I may gain Christ" [3:7–8]. Stop there. He is saying, "I don't care what it is, I don't care what I've done, I don't care what my heritage is, [what] my training is, [what] my works are. I take all of that stuff and I dump it when it comes to salvation." Salvation is not of you; it's of God. Look at [Philippians 3:]9. [Paul] says [he] wants to gain Christ that [he] "may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law."

[You might be wondering], "Well, then, Paul, if you can't be good enough to get to heaven, then where do you get your righteousness?" Here it is: "but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes," notice the direction here, "*from* God on the basis of faith" [emphasis added]. Righteousness comes from God. Whose righteousness is that?

Jesus'. When He justifies you, He not only takes your sin, He gives you the righteousness of Christ from God, and that makes you declared perfect in God's sight in Christ. God causes sinners to be justified. He makes the sinner right with Himself. This should make you eternally grateful and cause you to praise God incessantly. The holy God justifies ungodly, helpless sinners.

Second, God sovereignly reconciles you to Himself. [This whole idea of reconciliation] is inseparably related to justification. We've all had times when we get in an argument with somebody, maybe a neighbor, a family member, a spouse, the guy with the yappy dog next door. There's kind of a rift in the relationship. It's strained, and conversation is difficult or non-existent. Divorce is one of those cases where two people start fighting and arguing, and fighting and arguing, and pretty soon one of them files [for divorce], and the most common reason [given for the divorce] is "irreconcilable differences," which really means, "I am unwilling and/or unable to be reconciled with you. That is, I cannot be your friend anymore."

The word "reconciliation," or "to reconcile," literally means "to change or exchange." Let's just say that you go down to the tool place because you want the green and black, laser-sighted Hitachi sliding compound miter. You want [it], but they don't just give those away. You have to fork out the cash. You fork out the cash, you give it to the guy, and then he's willing to give you the saw. You have to make an exchange. Once he has his money, and you have your saw, you're reconciled. That's what that word means. In the Bible, men, in their fallen, sin-cursed state, don't want to be reconciled to God, and so God, by His sovereign grace, as we have learned, intervenes so that men then want to be reconciled, and they are able to be reconciled because somebody came in and paid the price so the sinner could be right with God. It wasn't you [who paid that price].

Turn to Romans 5. Again, we can only look at a couple [of] texts [on] each of these [sovereign acts of God]. [Look at] Romans 5:6–11, [and] I'm just going to do a quick commentary as we go through here just so you can see how reconciliation works, and how it's tied in very closely with

justification. Romans 5:6–11 [says], “For while we were still helpless,” that is a key term there—“helpless.” What that means in the Greek is “helpless.” “While we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” Notice that God takes the initiative in sending Christ to die for the ungodly. The ungodly doesn’t do something toward Christ, Christ does something for the ungodly. [Romans 5:]7: “For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us,” notice the direction, “in that while we were yet sinners,” now we’ve been described as helpless, ungodly sinners, “Christ died for us.” We don’t deserve to have God seek to be reconciled to us, but He takes the initiative, He sends His Son, Christ dies for us, He moves toward us.

[Romans 5:]9: “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood,” Christ’s blood, “we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.” God makes us right, justifies us, through the death of Christ. [Romans 5:]10: “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God,” we are helpless, ungodly sinners and enemies, “through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Here we see that our justification included reconciliation. It repaired the rift, the broken relationship, that people have with God. [Romans 5:]11: “And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” We praise God. This is one of the responses you should have. There’s something wrong with the Christian who walks around with a Lamentations-frontispiece-type of look on his face—moping, no joy. That is to deny that God has been extremely good to you and has reached out toward you and reconciled you to Himself through the death of His Son. If you’re a Christian, and you’re around Christians who love the Lord, [you’ll find that they are always saying things like], “Oh, God is so good. God is so kind,” and when they pray, [they say], “Thank You, Lord, for sending Christ, thank You for having Christ die for my sins, thank You for reconciling me to Yourself.” This is one of the applications of knowing this doctrine: it should cause you to praise God.

Turn over to 2 Corinthians 5:17. You might be wondering if praising God and being thankful is our only response to being reconciled to God, and the answer is “no.” There is another important application. I want you to look at [2 Corinthians 5:]17, [where] Paul says this: “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” Here, Paul is talking about regeneration, or being born again. He’s talking about being transformed. [If] you take a junky car and you put a lot of money and effort into it, you regenerate it. That’s what happens. You have a sinner, and when God’s grace invades his life, He causes him to be rebuilt, regenerated—the Scriptures call it being “born again.”

[2 Corinthians 5:]18: “Now all these things are from God,” notice the direction here. This is the sovereign work of God. Our salvation, our being changed into new creatures, is from God’s sovereign work, not ours. “Who reconciled us to Himself through” our good works? No, “through Christ.” Now watch this:

And gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. [5:18–21]

That is the whole process of justification in verse 21: Jesus is made sin on our behalf; He is the one who dies in our places so that we can become the righteousness of God. Jesus’ righteousness is given to us, our sin is being put on Christ, and that allows us to be reconciled to God, and then we can be friends of God.

The second application here is this: When you know you’re reconciled to God, that should make you want to see other people reconciled to God.

[Imagine that] you're going for a walk early Friday morning before work. It's nice outside, it's cool, and you're walking along and all of a sudden, you walk by this house, and you see all this furniture [outside]. It's really nice furniture and stuff out in the driveway, [which leads] into a garage full of tools. You're looking, and you're going, "Whoa!" and the front door is open and there's an arrow that says, "The whole house goes." You ask the person, "What's going on here?"

[He] says, "We're having an estate sale." Everything is premium [quality]. The sign says, "Museum quality furniture and artwork. All must go." You start looking at the prices, and you think, "Whoa! Whoa!" and you see that, "Man, this is a deal! This is a really good deal!" So what do you do? You pull out your cell phone and you start calling people. Why? [It is] because you want them to get in on the blessing.

Well, something better than the estate sale is here, and that is being reconciled to God. I think sometimes we're more excited about the estate sale than [we are about] being reconciled to God. There is a way to be reconciled with your Creator, with the God of the universe, and it's through the death of His Son. If you're sitting out there, [thinking], "OK, what do I need to do?" You need to realize that you have been committed with the ministry of reconciliation so that you can help bring other people to Christ. In 1 Peter 3:18—I love this passage—Peter, speaking of our salvation in Christ, says, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God." The word "reconciliation" isn't used there, but that's the concept: "bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit"—the resurrection. Jesus died and rose again to bring people to God—to reconcile them to God. So, Jesus is the key, and Jesus is the sovereign expression of a loving God to save those who are beyond the hope of being saved.

Third, God sovereignly redeems you. Redemption is another term that literally describes a monetary transaction. There are three basic words in the New Testament that are translated "redemption." The first term means "to purchase from the marketplace," literally, in just its basic Greek meaning,

and this is “agorazo,” [which] means “to purchase.” For instance, Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 7:23 when he speaks of believers being “bought with a price.” It is as if they were purchased from the marketplace. Paul [also] uses the term in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 as he’s talking about immorality and he’s telling people [these twelve reasons] to abstain from immorality, and at the very end, he says this:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

You have been purchased. Of course, it wasn’t from the marketplace; it was from the wrath of God who demands that sin be punished.

The second word [translated “redemption” or “redeemed”] is actually the same [Greek] word “agorazo” with an “ex” in front of it. An “ex” prefix [makes it] “exagorazo,” which means “to purchase *from* something.” Paul uses this term in Galatians 3:13, where he describes the believer as being redeemed *from* the curse of the law. You know how it is. You want to get something, you’re in the department store, you don’t have the money, [so you] say, “Can I put this on layaway?” (It used to be really popular—now we just give them Visa. You used to have “layaway.”)

The [clerk will] say, “We will hold this for seven days,” and if you want whatever [it] is [that] you put on layaway, you have to come back and “exagorazo,” get that thing out of hock, get it back, purchase it back.

The final word that is used to describe redemption is “lutroo,” which is “to obtain or release by a payment of price.” All these [terms] are closely related. Paul uses this term in Titus 2:14, where, speaking of the grace of God [that] saves people, [he says]: “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” That term there “to redeem us” is “lutroo.” The sovereign grace of God works to release people from the punishment of sin. God is not only the one who demands the punishment, but

He is the only one who can release them from punishment through the death of Christ, because Christ paid the penalty when He suffered and died on the cross. One of my favorite texts is 1 Peter 1:18–19, where Peter reminds believers [of the circumstances of their redemption], saying: “Knowing that you were not redeemed,” “lutroo,” “with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,” but here it is—what did it cost? How were you redeemed? What was the purchase? “But with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”

There are times when evil men take hostages. They snag [the] daughter [or] son [of some rich person], and take [the child] hostage. [The kidnapers] may leave a ransom note, and if the father [and] mother want their child back, they need to redeem their child from captivity, they need to pay the price to set their child free. The price paid to the kidnapers is called a “ransom.” There is also a Greek word, it just so happens, that is translated “ransom,” and it is that same “lutroo” word with “anti” in front of it. “Anti” mean[s] “in the place of,” [and] “lutroo” [means] “purchase by payment of price.” We have the word “Christ,” and we have the word “antichrist.” Who is the antichrist? [It is] one who is in place of Christ, right? He is the pseudo-Christ, the supplanter-Christ, the one who has come into the place of Christ to deceive people. He is the antichrist—the in-place-of-Christ. Well, here, you have this word “to redeem by payment of price” with “anti” in front of it, which means “that which you give in place of what you want.”

This is [the word] Paul uses in 1 Timothy 2:5–6, where he says: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom,” an “antilutron,” to stand in the place of, “for all, the testimony given at the proper time.” E.W. Vines, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, commenting on this text, points out that the phrase “a ransom for all” makes it clear that the ransom Christ paid is provisionally universal, which means that the death of Christ is sufficient to save all men. Then he goes on to say, “The provision was universal, for Christ died for all men, yet it is actually for those only who

accept God's conditions and who are described in the gospel statements as "the many," or, you could say "the few," "it is only by a sovereign act of God that anyone can be reconciled." We do not seek to be reconciled to God, God seeks to be reconciled to us, and then once He does, we respond to His grace.

Fourth, and finally, God sovereignly atones for your sin. I just want you to know [that] atonement is this huge area of discussion and debate in theological circles and has been for years. In fact, I'm doing a series on it in the *Calvary Review*. I don't know how long [it will take]—it'll probably take me a whole year to get through it. There are so many interesting facets here that have to do with the atonement, and really, when you start reading books and papers and things on it, for many the debate is about John Calvin and what he taught. John Calvin [was] the French Reformer who was one of the major people in the Reformation. You know what? We need to thank God for John Calvin. [He] was used by God in an incredible way. He systematized theology, he helped get the Reformation going, he was a faithful biblical expositor, but he was neither a perfect interpreter of Scripture nor was he inspired.

People who want to be Calvinites, people who want to maintain the Reform tradition, people who want to be in a certain camp, people who are more concerned about a creed, or their heritage, or whatever, often argue about what [Calvin] taught instead of going to the Book. In their minds, the goal is to maintain an association rather than [to] seek out the truth. I think the problem with the atonement is a failure to ask the right questions. When I talk to people about this, a lot of times they haven't even considered some of the key issues involved. You know what? It's a very minor thing that we, in our feeble, finite, sin-cursed minds can't synthesize all the texts and make them into a nice, tidy package. That's not a problem. What is a huge problem is if we don't go to the Book and the Book alone to find our truth. We [must] study, look up passages in their context, [see] what the text says, what the original author meant for the original audience to understand about

what was written, regardless of the system. Change the system—make the system submit to the Scriptures, never the Scriptures submit to the system.

[Picture this:] a husband is working on his car. He's crawling all over [the car], [and] he's getting really thirsty [because it's] hot in the garage, so he [goes] in the house and he gets a cup and he stands in front of the refrigerator and drinks about three glasses [of water] in a row, sets the glass down on the counter, and he starts to go [back out to the garage]. Out of the corner of his eye, [however], he sees something. He looks down, and there's grease on the floor because it was on his shoe. He looks around, sees there's a little area rug in front of the kitchen sink, and so he grabs [it], brings it over, and he drags it and covers up the grease [with it]. He [says], "There!" and he goes back to working on the car. He has covered the smudge [from] the grease.

This is kind of the concept that happened with atonement in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God required people to offer animal sacrifices [that] covered their sin, but it didn't make them perfect, it just covered their sin. God was willing to accept them based on their sacrifice, but not because the sacrifice of bulls and goats made them perfect, but because it represented a future sacrifice that would occur—the sacrifice of Christ—which could make them perfect. Jesus offered Himself up as a once-for-all sacrifice. This is mentioned in a lot of places in the Scriptures, especially in the book of Hebrews. If you study the book of Hebrews, you'll find lots about this in chapters 7–10. Look at Hebrews 9. I wish I could go through the whole thing, but in [Hebrews 9:]11–12, this is what we read. Just listen. It's speaking of Christ, and it says: "But when Christ appeared as a high priest," the high priest was the one who, on the Day of Atonement, would sacrifice the bull, take the blood into the Holy of Holies, [and] sprinkle the blood on the Mercy Seat, which is the lid of the Ark of the Covenant.

"When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands." Oh, that's interesting. It's hard to find tabernacles not made with hands. [The author of Hebrews] goes on to explain what he means: "That is

to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves,” so he’s saying [that] Jesus, as high priest, entered into a heavenly tabernacle, and He came, not with the blood of animals, he says, “but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” Jesus entered in, and made with His own blood what the author of Hebrews calls “having obtained eternal redemption.”

The author of Hebrews later makes it perfectly clear that animals wouldn’t cut it, because he says down in [Hebrews] 10:1: “For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices,” animal sacrifices, “which they offer continually year by year,” to cover their sins, “make perfect those who draw near.” In case you didn’t get that, he goes on to say in [Hebrews 10:]4: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Do you have it? You cannot atone for the sin of a person with an animal. You have to find a perfect person who is willing to die in the place of a sinner. It is only then that God will accept that sacrifice and atone for your sins. Then [your sin is] not covered, [it] is eradicated. It is washed away. You are made white as snow [see Isaiah 1:18]. You are as perfect as you can be because there is perfect atonement.

That’s the easy part. When you start reading about [atonement, people] start talking about a lot of different things. I’m just going to raise these questions to you because a lot of people want to come down on a camp, and yet they haven’t even asked themselves [these questions] and answered [them] from the Scriptures: 1) What is the scope of the atonement? 2) What about the definiteness of the atonement? 3) What about limited aspects of the atonement? 4) What about the intent of the atonement—God’s intention of the atonement? 5) What about the power and sufficiency of the atonement? 6) What is the difference between payment and atonement? 7) What is the difference between provision and the application of a provision, which is atonement? 8) What is the important distinction between these two phrases: “Jesus died to save,” and “Jesus died for”?

It would also be fun to look at texts that teach that Jesus died for some—the elect—and to look at texts that teach that Jesus died for all, but when you look at the context, “all” means “some.” It would be fun to look at texts where it says [that] Jesus died for all, where “all” means “all, every, each.” It would also be good to look at the implications of a universal offer of the gospel to all men—the gospel including the atonement of sins available to those who believe—and to look at the implications of God condemning unbelievers for rejecting the gospel—a legitimate offer of salvation that they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved [see 2 Thessalonians 2:10].

[If] you answer those questions, then you'll start approaching what needs to be answered in order to come up with your view of the atonement, and that's why we are not going to go into any more here. But, having said that, let me just give you three simple facts [that] can help you sort through this. Again, I'm sorry that we can't go through all those questions, but the *Calvary Review* in the months to come will deal with it.

One: Christ's death made provision for the sins of the world, and is universal in its strength and ability to save all men. Two: The Gospel is to be preached to all men and the gospel offers all men salvation through the death of Christ, who died for the sins of the world—every, each person. [Three]: It is the elect, and the elect only, who receive atonement for sins—no one ever goes to hell having their sins perfectly washed away, otherwise there would be no reason for condemnation [for] they would be perfect in God's sight. Think through that, and study it up, and then you'll begin to understand why there are disagreements [about] the atonement.

At the beginning of the sermon, I mentioned John Bunyan's allegorical character Ignorance. I mentioned him for one reason: Ignorance is portrayed as the kind of person who doesn't believe in the sovereignty of God in salvation. Remember, he came his own way. He was trusting in his own good works, and good deeds, and good heritage, and philanthropy. Then he went on his own path, which brought him to the same place. At the very end of the book, Christian and Hopeful have just gone through the River of

Death. They waded in there, and Christian almost sank, but he found solid footing when he remembered the promises of God. He came out [of the river] and his dirty armor fell off, and it floated across to the other side. He was clothed in white raiments, and the angels came and they carried him to the gate of the city. There were shouts, and applause, and they opened the gates. When you're reading, [you think], "Oh, yeah!" Then Bunyan writes this:

Now, while I was gazing upon all these things, I turned my head to look back, and saw Ignorance come up to the river side; but he soon got over, and that without half the difficulty which the other two men met with. For it happened that there was then in that place one Vain-Hope, a ferryman, that with his boat helped him over; so he, as the other I saw, did ascend the hill, to come up to the gate; only he came alone, neither did any man meet him with the least encouragement.

When he was come up to the gate, he looked up to the writing that was above, and then began to knock, supposing that entrance should have been quickly administered to him; but he was asked by the men that looked over the top of the gate, Where do you come from? and what do you want?

He answered, I have ate and drank in the presence of the King, and he has taught in our streets. Then they asked him for his certificate, that they might go in and show it to the King: so he fumbled in his pockets for one, and found none.

Then they said, Have you none? but the man answered never a word. So they told the King, but he would not come down to see him, but commanded the two shining ones, that conducted Christian and Hopeful to the city, to go out and take Ignorance, bind him hand and foot, and cast him away.

Then they took him up, and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the hill, and put him in there. Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gate of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction. So I awoke, and behold it was a dream.

That is scary. [Bunyan's] whole point in ending with that is to make sure that anybody who read that book would not be ignorant in thinking that they could save themselves by their works, their creed, their religiosity, or anything else they did, and that [a person] can be extremely religious and still get to hell when he thinks he's on his way to heaven.

If you're sitting out there this morning, and you're realizing, "I don't know Jesus. I don't love God. I don't love God's Word. I don't love God's people," then today is the day of salvation [see 2 Corinthians 6:2]. You can come to Christ now. You can turn from your sins; you can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do it and God will save you. The gospel is that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, that He was buried, that He rose again on the third day so that you, through faith in Him, could be justified, could be reconciled, could be redeemed, could have your sins perfectly atoned for. This is the offer that God gives to you. If you believe in your heart that this is true, and you are willing to receive Christ as your Lord and your Savior, God will do His part. As a matter of fact, He will already have been doing His part.

For those of you who know Christ already, when you leave here, you need to be thankful, you need to be rejoicing, and you need to be telling other people how they can be reconciled to God, for all of us who know Christ are ambassadors for Christ, and we are called to go out and tell people about the good deal: that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in the person of Christ alone. Let's pray.

Father, we are so grateful for this morning. Again, I thank You for these people who have endured the sweltering heat. And, Father, we are grateful for all the Sundays where the air conditioning wasn't broken. We are thank-

ful, Father, for Your kindness to us and that it wasn't as hot today as it has been in earlier days this summer. We're also thankful that You sovereignly justify, reconcile, redeem, and atone for unworthy sinners and You do it because You are a God of grace and mercy. Father, for those who don't know You, may they cry out to You now in their hearts. May they receive the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. For the rest, may we leave here rejoicing, exalting in You, praising You, and eager to let other people know how they, too, can be reconciled to God. Father, we pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

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