

Session 5

GOD IS SELF-SACRIFICING

Philippians 2:6-11

Memory Verse

For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—¹¹ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.


– PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11, CSB



God is Self-Sacrificing

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Because of the radical corruption of sin from which all people suffer, our salvation takes nothing less than a complete rescue by God. As Scripture says, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6).

 What is your favorite sport to play? To watch?

 Why do you like that sport the best? What makes it different from other sports?

Baseball is a unique sport. The main action throughout the game is between two players: the pitcher and the batter. The game of baseball is like watching a series of duels. Even though each of those two players has a whole team behind him, in the moments that the ball is travelling from the pitcher’s hand to home plate, there is nothing those other players can do. Everything depends on just those two players. It isn’t uncommon for the outcome of the game to come down on what happens in that final duel between pitcher and batter.

This is a helpful example of what it means to be saved. When the batter hits the winning homerun, the guys in the dugout can take no credit whatsoever for the hit ball but they share in the victory. They receive the benefits of his performance. Similarly, Christians can take no credit in their salvation because Jesus Christ accomplished that victory. He did everything and deserves all the credit. Christians are in awe of His finished work and rejoice because they benefit from it.

Session Summary

Paul's letter to the church in Philippi was a joyful, grateful encouragement to a group of believers Paul loved dearly. Paul sowed the seed of the gospel there and was encouraged by the reports he received about their continued faith in Jesus Christ. His purpose in writing was to urge them to continue on the pilgrim way toward heaven. He wanted them to live as citizens of heaven (which is what they were), even though they had not yet reached that eternal rest.

In the passage we are studying today, Paul encouraged the Philippians to live in unity. He sought to motivate them toward that unity by reminding them of the way Christ humbled Himself on their behalf. If Christ, being their Savior and God, humbled Himself for their good, then they ought to do the same for their brothers and sisters. As Paul laid out his argument for the Philippians, he reiterated the essence of the gospel that we see throughout Scripture. Salvation was not of their works, lest they boast, but by grace through faith. Jesus did the work to save God's people.

Many people believe they must work their way to God. They have the erroneous idea that their good works will curry God's favor and cover their own sins. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is God has done everything necessary for our salvation. He comes to His people, calls them out of sin and darkness, and draws them to His Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World. Christians today can rest in the finished work of Christ for the salvation of their souls.

1. He Took on Flesh (Phil. 2:6-7)

The prophet Isaiah, hundreds of years before Christ, prophesied, "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). Long before that, God promised a Rescuer would come from Eve's offspring. (See Gen. 3:15.) But it wasn't until after Jesus' arrival that people truly understood what those Old Testament promises meant. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).



Is it necessary to believe Jesus was God incarnate (in flesh) to be a Christian? Explain.

If the incarnation of Christ isn't true, then all hope is lost. It is necessary to believe this for our own salvation and because it is the clear teaching of the Bible. Those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb love the Book that prophesies His coming, tells of His life and ministry, and records His words. It is impossible to be a follower of Jesus and reject the very thing Jesus gave to His people so they might know the gospel and live by it.

The testimony of the church certainly stirs up and persuades those who are in Christ to adopt a high view of and reverent respect for the Scriptures. The heavenliness of its contents, the power of the truth, and the harmony of its parts serve to motivate Christians to take up and read day by day. However, a Christian's full persuasion and assurance of the truth and authority of the Scriptures comes finally and fully from the internal work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in their hearts.



How was the incarnation an act of sacrifice on our behalf by Christ?

You may have heard of the condescension of God on behalf of sinners. This simply means He reaches down to meet people, because people are unable to reach up to Him. What we must also remember is that the condescension of Christ included humiliation. In other words, He underwent humiliating circumstances to meet us. He humbled Himself. (See Phil. 2:8a.) Love led Him down to the cradle. It was the strong love of Christ that brought Him down from heaven for the sake of rebels, to take on their flesh and nature. What kind of love was this that God should become man! The divine Spirit became flesh; He who formed the world was born of a poor virgin, in a dirty village, and all for the sake of His enemies!

There has never been (nor will there ever be) a greater humiliation than the Son of God taking on the flesh and the nature of man.

? Application: Do you believe Jesus Christ was the Son of God and was born of a virgin to take on flesh? How might Jesus' humiliation on your behalf spur you on to humble yourself before your brothers and sisters in Christ?

2. He Underwent Trials (Phil. 2:8a)

Jesus' condescension and humiliation wasn't only His leaving heaven, being clothed in human flesh, and assuming a human nature. That was the first step in a long, humiliating work of providing salvation for those who don't deserve to be saved and who could never save themselves. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient.

? Why did Jesus humble Himself and take on flesh? What was the point?

Jesus' taking on flesh is a critical part of His saving work on behalf of the ungodly. Jesus is both fully God and fully man. It could be no other way if man's sins were to be atoned for. As a man Jesus rightfully earned righteousness and the approval of God the Father through His perfectly obedient life. He was tempted in every way that we are, but He always did what was right and never did what was wrong. Not only that, but He also felt the full weight of the strain placed upon His soul when He withstood the temptations of the devil. Why did He allow Himself to be brought under that great trial? For the love of God the Father and the love of those His Father would give to Him. (See John 6:37.)

Not only that, but in His human flesh He bore the physical pain on His way to the cross and as He died upon it. This included every tear of skin, every prick of the thorn, every buffet of the cheek. He felt it all. God the Father held nothing of

His wrath against sin back in the punishment of His beloved Son. Jesus did all of this willingly, gladly even, so that Christians might be saved to the uttermost and glorify God both now and forever.

Of course, Jesus' taking on of human flesh did not nullify His divinity. Jesus, while fully human, was still fully God. He had to be. Being divine, Jesus wasn't corrupted with original sin that all humans are born with. Furthermore, no mere man would be able to bear up under the wrath of God against sin without being destroyed. Jesus was able to shoulder the punishment for sin because He was truly the Son of God. Both His identity as well as His finished work were proven in His resurrection from the grave.

? What does it mean for us today that Jesus sacrificed Himself and overcame these trials?

Jesus triumphantly overcame all the trials that he faced when he walked the earth in human flesh. He never faltered in a single area. He never gave in to a single temptation. He never vacillated in his full obedience to the Father.

We may take three wonderful truths as we reflect on Jesus' victory over trials. First, we have a Savior who sympathizes with us: "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Second, we have a Savior who is truly able to save us because the righteousness He earned by overcoming all trials in perfect obedience is now credited to the accounts of those who trust in Him. Third, because Jesus overcame the trials through which He had to pass, He lives forevermore and intercedes on behalf of those who trust in Him. Thus, Christians rest in a sympathetic, righteous, and mediating Savior!

? Application: How does Jesus' example and work on your behalf help you face trials when they come your way?

3. He Submitted to the Cross (Phil. 2:8b-11)

Finally, Jesus condescended and humbled Himself to the point of a shameful death on the cross.



Why was it necessary for Jesus to die on the cross? How does this great and glorious truth affect those who believe it?

The Bible is clear that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness for sin and the wages of sin is death. (See Rom. 6:23 and Heb. 9:22.) Thus, there was a need of a death. God the Father, to meet this need, sent the Son to take on flesh and die. He died because the Scriptures say, “The person who sins is the one who will die” (Ezek. 18:4). Now, because of Christ, God is both the just and the justifier. (See Rom. 3:26.)

Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is the very basis for living a life that is right in God’s sight. It all starts with the work Jesus accomplished on our behalf. Apart from Jesus’ work, Christians don’t have the ability to glorify God in any way. Without Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, all people remain under God’s judgment and wrath. In fact, the Old Testament describes our good works as “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6, NIV). But, once a person is saved and given the right to become a child of God (see John 1:12), then they are able to please their Creator by doing good works.

Not only are Christians given the ability to please the Father, but they are also given the desire to worship Him through obedience. Followers of Jesus look to Him as an example to follow. That is what Paul said here in this passage. Not only did Jesus open the way for Christians to know God and please Him with their works, but He also showed them how to do those works. Peter commanded believers to walk in Jesus’ steps. (See 1 Pet. 2:21.) Jesus gave the ultimate example of thinking of others’ interest first in His death on the cross.

? How has the finished work of Christ changed the way God receives the works of believers compared to those who have not trusted in Him?


The Bible is very clear that a person that is not in Christ remains under God's wrath and judgment. (See John 3:36.) In fact, in Isaiah 59:2 we read that our sins cause God's face to be hidden from us and that He does not hear us. Then, in Isaiah 64:6, our good works are described as "filthy rags" (NIV).


No, the good works of unbelievers do not please a holy God. Why are the good works of believers pleasing to God? The good works of believers are pleasing to God because of their standing before Him through Christ's sacrifice. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that Jesus became sin so that we could "become the righteousness of God." In other words, Christians are made righteous in God's sight because Jesus' righteousness has been transferred to those who have repented of sin and trusted in Christ. Ephesians 2:8-10 explains this well, saying Christians were created in Christ Jesus for good works! As children of God, through the work of Christ Jesus on the cross, Christians can please their heavenly Father by being obedient to His will revealed in the Scriptures.

? Application: How do you view good works? Are they a way for you to gain God's favor and pay the price for your own sin? Or are they out of an overflow of joy and gratitude because of what God has done on your behalf through Christ?

Conclusion

The only thing Christians contribute to their salvation is the sin that made it necessary. One of the greatest lies of the enemy is to convince the world that if they work hard enough, do enough good deeds, and are religious enough, then they can earn their way into heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth.

 What has been most impactful for you as you've reflected on the sacrifice of Christ on your behalf?

 How does the sacrifice of Christ lead us to live differently with those within the church? How has it enabled and empowered us to live in a sacrificial way with others?

 How might you seek gospel conversations with others by sharing about the sacrifice of Christ?

CHRIST CONNECTION: Jesus of Nazareth was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He did all of this for the glory of God and the good of sinners. He is the perfect atoning sacrifice.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Those who have experienced the grace of God in Jesus Christ are called to testify about Christ to the world. Those who hear the gospel and respond with faith and repentance are saved from their sin and made children of God.



FOR NEXT WEEK

A Roadmap For Gospel Conversations

Main Passages

- Romans 3:10-12,23; 5:1,6-11; 6:23; 8:1,38-39; 10:9-10,13-14

Session Outline

1. All Have Sinned and Face Death (Rom. 3:10-12,23; 6:23)
2. Jesus Made the Way for Salvation (Rom. 5:6-11; 10:9-10,13-14)
3. Through Jesus We Have Peace with God (Rom. 5:1; 8:1,38-39)

Memorize

*For this reason God highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow—
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth—
¹¹ and every tongue will confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

- Philippians 2:9-11, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Philippians 2:6-11
- Tuesday - 1 John 2:2
- Wednesday - 1 John 4:10
- Thursday - Ephesians 5:2
- Friday - 1 Peter 2:24
- Saturday - 2 Corinthians 5:21