

Called to Salvation

August 3, 2025

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Romans 1:16-17; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Ephesians 2:8-9

Session Outline

1. How We Are Saved (Ephesians 2:8-9)
2. What's Next? (2 Corinthians 5:11-21)
3. Unashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17)

Theological Theme

When we deeply understand the magnitude of the gift Christ offers us in salvation, we feel compelled to share that good news with others.

Call to Action

If you became a believer later in life, make a list of what things have changed in your beliefs, thoughts, actions, and habits since then. If you became a believer early, perhaps as a young child, consider how God has shaped you. What decisions might you have made differently if not guided by Christ's work in your life?



Leader Guide

Called to Salvation

Introduction

John Newton considered himself a failure in many areas of life. By the time he turned 11, his mother had died, and he was brought to live at sea with his father, who was a sailor. He eventually embraced life at sea and the debauchery and poor choices that came with this decision, and he abandoned the Christian morals his mother had taught him.

In 1748, after Newton had made many poor choices, his father ordered him to go back to England. During the journey, the boat he was on, the *Greyhound*, encountered a huge storm. While the crew struggled to survive, Newton struggled with the reality of his life and the choices he'd made. When they found land, Newton found Jesus.

Newton made his way into ministry around 1755 and continued his work through the early 1800s. In 1773, as part of a sermon, he wrote the hymn he is most known for: "Amazing Grace." Think about the power of the salvation Newton described in the lyrics: Grace so amazing, so powerful, that it can save even a wretch of a person, lost in sin so deep they feel like they could never be rescued.¹

Newton saw firsthand how God could work powerfully in a person's life, remaking and rerouting it for the better. Today, we'll explore what Scripture says about the power of salvation and consider how it has reshaped our lives for good.

- ❓ How has God shown His amazing grace in your life?
- ❓ Would anyone like to share the story of when you were saved?

Session Summary

Today, we're talking about salvation. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. This isn't something we can earn on our own; it's a gift offered by God. When we understand the depth of God's love for us, and the magnitude of that gift, we are compelled to live differently, acting as Christ's ambassadors and sharing that love with others.

Paul lived a life unashamed of the gospel, sharing it freely and openly, with little regard for personal preference or safety. When we are unashamed of the gospel, we also share openly. Like a stick of dynamite fundamentally changes a building being remodeled, God works powerfully through the gospel, remodeling lives.

1. How We Are Saved (Ephesians 2:8-9)

- ❓ How would you explain salvation in Jesus to someone unfamiliar with the idea?
- ❓ What important points about salvation did Paul make in these two verses?

Ephesians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus. These two simple verses in Ephesians share an important gospel truth. The New Living Translation makes it even simpler: “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”

We are saved by *grace alone*.

Mercy is when we don’t receive something we deserve (like God’s wrath, which we deserve because of the sin in our lives), and grace is when we get something we don’t deserve. In this case, the thing we get from God that we absolutely don’t deserve is salvation. The rightful result of our sin is death, but God’s gift of salvation brings eternal life (Romans 6:23).

We could never hope to earn salvation, no matter how many “good” deeds we check off our to-do list. In Galatians 2:21, Paul said if we could earn our own salvation, then the cross would’ve been for nothing. Our culture places great emphasis and value on accomplishment. We celebrate the idea of earning something by working hard. There is nothing wrong with working hard to earn something. In fact, working hard is a biblical concept (Colossians 3:23-24), but we can never be saved by our work.

We only receive salvation through grace. It is a gift, freely given by God (Ephesians 2:8). We only receive and accept it. When we place faith in Jesus and choose to follow Him, we accept that gift of grace. So, how does salvation work, exactly? This is a concept many Christians struggle to put it into words. Scripture teaches we are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus:

Not Achievement but Need

The memorable words in verses 8–9 express a central idea in Paul’s theology. He declared that the nature of God is to give freely because of His own love. God does not deal with people on the level of human achievement but on the level of their deepest needs.

- If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
—Romans 10:9
- For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
—Romans 10:13

If you haven’t trusted in Jesus yet, but you want to, a simple prayer you can pray is: “Dear God, I know I’m a sinner. I ask you to forgive me of my sins. I believe Jesus is the Son of God, and I want to follow Him. Amen.” (If you know someone who doesn’t know Jesus yet, this is an easy prayer to lead them through as well.)

 Application: What are your big takeaways about salvation from these two verses? Who could you share this with?

2. What’s Next? (2 Corinthians 5:14-21)

 What does it mean to be compelled by Christ’s love (v. 14)? How does that affect our lives?

 What does it mean to be a “new creation” in Christ (v. 17)?

Second Corinthians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth, which had been plagued by false teachers (2 Corinthians 11:13-15), who had convinced many in the church to abandon the gospel Paul proclaimed. This passage reminds us that receiving salvation is not the end of the process, but the beginning of a changed life. We are saved . . . now what?

Paul wrote that he was compelled by the love of Christ. God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sin. That is a life-changing kind of love. Jesus’s sacrifice made a way for us to be in direct relationship with God and changes the way we live. Living for Jesus is naturally going to look different than when we lived for ourselves before salvation. We, like Paul, should be compelled to share that love with others.

Those saved by Christ are made into a new creation. This is a concept we see more than once in the New Testament. After we meet and follow Jesus, we are transformed by His Spirit completely. Where we were previously dead in our sins, we are now alive. Every day, the Holy Spirit works in us to make us more like Jesus in word and deed. We won’t ever get this one hundred percent perfect, but when we are walking with God, our lives look differently than they did before coming to know Jesus. One of the ways our lives look different is through the ministry of reconciliation.

What is reconciliation? To be reconciled means to restore a broken relationship. The relationship in view in this passage is our relationship with God. God is perfect; we are not. We are all sinners (Romans 3:23), and we need reconciliation in our relationship with God because sin separates us from Him.

How are we reconciled to God? In the Old Testament, God's people were reconciled through sacrifices and offerings, but these measures, and this plan, was always only temporary. The long-term plan was always Jesus, who is the ultimate sacrifice.

- “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” — John 3:16
- But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. —Romans 5:8

Where animal sacrifices were temporary, Jesus's sacrifice is permanent—it covers our past, present, and future sins. We are reconciled with God (our relationship with Him is restored) because Jesus paid the debt for our sin on the cross. He died for our sins and was raised three days later. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

The ministry of reconciliation that Paul described in this passage is one given to all believers, not just people like Paul (or those in vocational ministry). God wants to use all of us as His ambassadors who share with others so that they might also be reconciled to God through Jesus.

 Application: Think about what your life looked like before you knew Jesus. How has your life changed since following Him?

3. Unashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17)

 What does it mean to be unashamed of the gospel?

 In what way is the gospel powerful in our lives and the world?

Romans is a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the persecuted church in Rome. It contains many foundational truths for believers. This is why many use the “Romans Road” to share the gospel today.

When we are ashamed of something, we can feel embarrassed or reluctant to act or call attention to that thing. When we are unashamed, though, we act openly. We aren't restrained or reluctant. We act proudly.

Paul said he was unashamed of the gospel. For Paul, this meant sharing the gospel no matter the consequences. As we read in 2 Corinthians, Paul felt compelled to share the gospel, and he shared with little regard to his own preferences or physical safety. (The book of Acts is riddled with accounts of the persecution Paul endured for the sake of the gospel.)

In America, we may not face persecution as Paul did, but we might experience embarrassment or reluctance to tell other people about Jesus. Maybe we've never shared the message of Jesus before and are afraid we will say something wrong. Maybe we're worried about what others will say or think (being "canceled" by someone we value). These feelings are normal, and we should take them to the Lord in prayer. Though we are responsible to share, we can't create change or make someone receptive to the gospel message. That takes the pressure off us for results. That's the Holy Spirit's job, and He will work as He wills through our obedience.

These verses also make clear salvation comes from God and is available to anyone who believes. God has the power to save. God has the power to change lives. The Greek word used for "power" here is *dynamis*.² It's where we get the word "dynamite."³ God has the power and ability to completely reshape the way our lives look. Just like a stick of dynamite completely reshapes anything it impacts, the gospel has been radically changing lives like Paul's since the first century.



Application: What would it look like for you specifically to live unashamed of the gospel? How do you need to take action?

Conclusion

Our first passage in Ephesians explained a foundational truth about salvation: We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus alone. Salvation is Jesus plus nothing. We don't have to believe in Jesus and have perfect attendance at church or believe in Jesus and never sin again. Good works are a natural result when we are walking rightly with God, but they don't earn or keep our salvation. Salvation is a gift we receive when we believe the truth about Jesus and follow Him.

In our passage in 2 Corinthians, Paul wrote of being compelled by Jesus's love. When we understand the depth of God's love for us, and the magnitude of that truth, we are compelled to live differently and share God's love with others.

In Romans, Paul declared that he was not ashamed of the gospel, and we considered if we can say the same. If we claim we are not ashamed, are we living like it? When we are unashamed of the gospel, we are unhindered in sharing with others how Jesus has shaped our lives.

Like a stick of dynamite fundamentally changes a building being remodeled, God works powerfully through the gospel, remodeling lives. God can do more than we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20), and His deep, sacrificial love for us is the best news that is always worth sharing.

- ❓ We read in Ephesians 2:8: “you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift.” How might this gift be a difficult concept for those who have missed the mark a lot? Why is this such good news for those who know how much they need something outside of themselves for salvation?
- ❓ Why should the magnitude of God’s gift of salvation and forgiveness compel us to share the gospel with others?
- ❓ How is God calling you to live unashamed for the gospel this week? How will you respond?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for His amazing grace. Thank Him for the gift of salvation and how He has worked powerfully in your life. Ask for His help as you seek to share the gospel with those around you.

Memory Verse

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. —Romans 1:16

Additional Resources

- *Romans* by R. C. Sproul
- *Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians* by Eric Mason
- *Be Rich* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Romans

Purpose

Paul's purpose in writing Romans can be identified from his direct statements in the text and inferred from the content. He expressly wrote that he wanted to impart spiritual strength to the believers at Rome (1:11–12; 16:25–26). He asked for prayer for the difficult task he was undertaking (15:30) and that he might be able to come and see them (15:32). He hoped to enlist the Roman churches to support a mission to the west (15:23–29). The content of the letter shows that the churches experienced tensions between believers from different backgrounds. Paul wanted them to be united and to avoid dissension and false teaching (16:17–18). The content also reveals his exposition of what is essential Christianity and what are matters of indifference.

Author

Paul the apostle is the stated and indisputable author of the book of Romans. From the book of Acts and statements in Romans, we learn that Paul wrote this letter while he was in Corinth and on his way to Jerusalem in the spring of AD 57, to deliver an offering from the Gentile churches to poor Jewish Christians (Ac 20:3; Rm 15:25–29).

Setting

All of Paul's writings grew out of his missionary/pastoral work and were about the problems and needs of local churches. The book of Romans is also of this genre, but it is the least "local" in the sense that Paul had not yet been to Rome. This letter was his opportunity to expound the good news message (the gospel). He could discuss the essence of sin, the salvation accomplished on the cross, the union of the believer with Christ, how the Spirit works in the Christian to promote holiness, the place of the Jewish people in God's plan, future things, and Christian living or ethics. Though Paul did not write Romans as a systematic theology, his somewhat orderly exposition has been the fountain for the development of that discipline.

Special Features

Paul's letter to the Roman house churches has been preeminent among the New Testament writings for its theological and pastoral influence. It focuses on the doctrine of salvation, including the practical implications for believers as they live out the salvation given to them through Jesus Christ.

Extended Commentary

Romans 1:16-17

1:16 Why might someone be ashamed of the gospel? On the surface, the gospel seems like a very strange message. It is about a Jewish carpenter and teacher who was put to death on a cross by Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judea in AD 26–36. The message says that this man Jesus was raised from the dead and is now Lord—the (Gk) kurios. This title was used of God in the Greek Bible and was applied to the emperor by some Romans. Paul himself wrote that this message seemed foolish to Gentiles (1Co 1:23) and was a stumbling block to Jews. A crucified Messiah seemed to be a contradiction in terms to the Jews. A crucified Jew seemed like foolishness to the Romans, who despised Jews in general. Anyone who was crucified was considered among the lowest members of society. Paul had no confidence in his rhetorical skills to overcome the human objections to the message, but he knew the power of the Spirit to change the lives of people as they heard the good news about Jesus’s death and resurrection. People are saved by faith, but faith is not the cause of salvation. The cause of salvation is the grace of God, the will of God, and the power of God working through the message.

1:17 The righteousness of God was the core of Paul’s message. Martin Luther came to better understand God’s grace as he studied this verse in the original Greek rather than in the Latin translation. It forever changed his view of God. God’s righteousness can be understood in several ways. First, God always does what is right and can be said to have righteousness as one of his attributes (Dt 32:4; Ps 119:142). Second, since God always does what is right, his actions or activities are sometimes identified as his righteousness (Is 45:8; 46:13; 51:5–6, 8; 56:1). Third, God’s righteousness is as a gift from him to us, justifying us in his sight. “Justification” is a courtroom term signifying that a judge declares a person to be “right” or “just.” Augustine wrote, “The righteousness of God is that righteousness which he imparts in order to make men righteous” (Spirit and the Letter, chap. 16). In the gospel, God reveals his righteousness (his nature, his activity, and his gift of right status) by faith. In the course of this letter, Paul will explain how God is able to declare sinners to be righteous because of Jesus’s work on the cross. From faith to faith emphasizes that the entire process of being declared righteous comes to us from start to finish by faith.⁴

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

5:11–12 The fear of the Lord is the awe and respect due to Christ as the judge of a believer’s works. A prominent OT wisdom theme (Pr 1:7), fear of God may not be forgotten by NT believers (Ac 9:31; Rv 15:4). The Corinthians needed to be reminded of this fear in terms of their treatment of Christ’s apostle. Paul’s motives were pure, both before the Lord he feared and before the people he served.

5:13–14 Paul’s opponents probably had suggested that he was religiously unbalanced (see Ac 26:24). He was “insane” in that the love of Christ compelled him into vigorous apostolic ministry. On the other hand, his ministry among the Corinthians had never been that of a madman (1Co 2:1–5). Indeed, he had kept his “third heaven” vision private for fourteen years until he mentioned it later in this letter (12:1–10). The heart of Paul’s message was that the Jewish Messiah had died on behalf of all kinds of sinners (1Co 15:3). Jews as well as Gentiles were included in Jesus’s substitutionary death (Rv 7:9). In union with Christ, sinners who believe the gospel have died to sin and have been raised to walk in a new way of life.

5:15 The phrase those who live refers to believers who are now spiritually alive (Eph 2:4–6). Christ’s death and resurrection ministry have become the pattern for the believer’s death and new-life ministry. Paul personally modeled this as well.

5:16 The phrase from a worldly perspective is a good rendering of the Greek text (lit “according to the flesh”). There are always two conflicting perspectives on a situation: the worldly versus the divine. A worldly view of Christ led to his crucifixion and to Paul’s persecution of Christ-followers. After the light of divine revelation broke in on Paul on the Damascus road, he could no longer know him in this way (Ac 9).

5:17–18 The words in Christ refer to being in union with him. Genuine conversion begins life transformation, but not by reforming the old nature. The indwelling Spirit creates divine life in believers (Rm 8:8–10), so that the new has come. Other NT passages communicate this truth by using language such as “born again” or “regeneration” (Jn 3:3–8; Ti 3:5; 1Pt 1:23). Those who were enemies of God have now become friends by being reconciled to him. God’s wrath against sin was satisfied in the death of his Son. Sinners—who formerly put self-interest above God’s glory (Rm 1:21; 3:23)—have been brought to cherish God as their highest treasure (2Co 4:6). The ministry of reconciliation—being an agent of this good news—was Paul’s special responsibility, but the task belongs to all who have received this ministry.

5:19–21 What Christ did, God did. Christ’s death mainly affected the world, that is, human sinners (rather than evil supernatural beings, for whom no divine provision for reconciliation has been made). Christ’s death upholds God’s righteousness. Trespasses were placed on the one who did not know sin. In return, the righteousness of God is credited (imputed) to all who are in him. The message of reconciliation is known to others only when ambassadors for Christ spread it. The Great Commission is the responsibility of reconciled human beings, not angels (Mt 28:18–20).⁵

Ephesians 2:8–9

2:8–9 The work of salvation is for God’s glory and is not accomplished by human works. The whole process of salvation is not a human achievement, but is an act of God’s goodness. The emphasis is always on Christ, the object of faith, not on the amount of faith. Salvation is by God’s completely unmerited favor. In the Greek text, the grammatical construction of the entire phrase by grace through faith serves as the antecedent of the phrase it is God’s gift. We must not portray grace as God’s part and faith as our part, for all of salvation is a gift from God.

The work of reconciliation is not from yourselves and not from works, so that no one can boast. This prevents the slightest self-congratulation or boasting in the believer. God alone saves.⁶

References

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