GOD'S SAVING GRACE: PLANNED, PURCHASED, AND APPLIED

Hutton Christopher Sharp

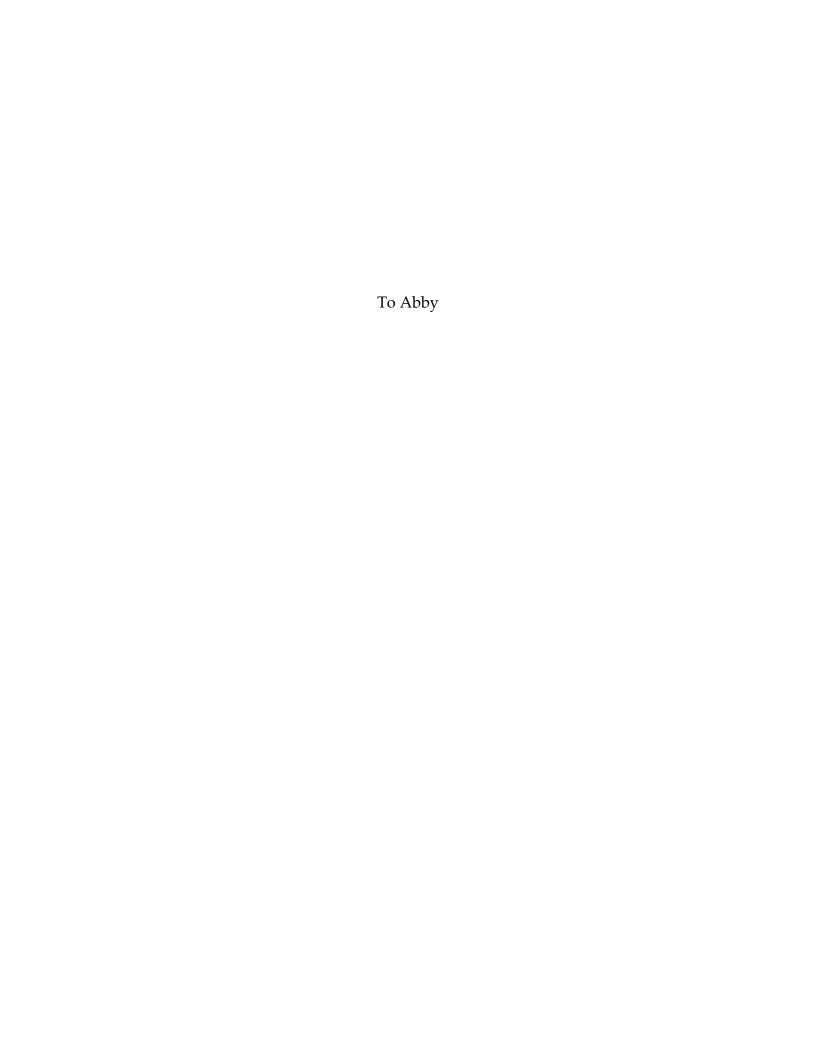
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1. Introduction

As Christians, we rejoice in the reality that our God has been gracious to save us. We see this in the biblical teaching of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. We sing about God's grace, we hear stories of how God's grace has changed people's lives, and we even see some churches with "Grace" in their name.

But we don't always understand exactly what God's saving grace means. It's one of those concepts that we like to sing and hear about and see, but when it comes down to it most of us have a misunderstanding of what saving grace really is. The point of this study is to help us all rightly understand how God has been gracious to save us.

When we talk about God's saving grace, we should do so under three categories:

- 1. Saving grace is *planned* by the Father
- 2. Saving grace is *purchased* by the Son
- 3. Saving grace is *applied* by the Spirit

Each of these categories points out a different aspect of the biblical teaching of God's saving grace. And not only that: thinking about God's saving grace in this way also helps us think about how our one God exists as three co-equal and co-eternal Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This doctrine is called the Trinity. So when we talk about God's saving grace, we need to say things like the Father planned to give saving grace to specific people, the Son purchases all that was needed for those people to have saving grace, and the Spirit applies this saving grace to those same people.

When we talk about God's saving grace, we're really talking about how God saves sinners. And when we talk about how God saves sinners, we need to understand that the three Persons of the one God each work together in order to accomplish the salvation of those sinners. Saving grace is *planned* by the Father, *purchased* by the Son, and *applied* by the Spirit. We'll go to Scripture to look at each of these categories.

It's also important to know that Christians have believed this for thousands of years. Brilliant pastor-theologians like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Owen, Edwards, Spurgeon, and Bavinck all believed that saving grace is *planned*, *purchased*, and *applied*. The fact that all of these men agreed on this idea doesn't mean that it's automatically right, but it does mean that we should think hard before we believe something different.

Another way of saying that saving grace is *planned*, *purchased*, and *applied* is to say that "salvation belongs to the LORD" (Psalm 3:8; Jonah 2:9). Or we could say that "from God comes my salvation . . . On God rests my salvation" (Psalm 62:1, 7). Or we could even say that "salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:11). There are plenty of other biblical references that we could make, but the truth is all summed up in these words of God spoken through Isaiah: "I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior" (Isaiah 43:11).

And if all of that isn't enough, there's yet another way of saying that God's saving grace is *planned*, *purchased*, and *applied*. We could say that God save sinners from the beginning (the plan), in the middle (the purchase), and to the end (the application). In order for God's saving grace to be *grace*, God alone must save sinners. Sinners cannot help God save them, otherwise saving grace would no longer be grace.

To conclude this introduction, we love God's saving grace, even if we don't always perfectly understand exactly what it means for us. Thinking about God's saving grace as *planned* by the Father, *purchased* by the Son, and *applied* by the Spirit helps us better understand the nature of saving grace. It helps us better understand the gospel because the gospel is the message about God's saving grace for us in Christ. And if we begin to understand God's saving grace more clearly, we can also begin to worship God more faithfully for who He is and what He has done for us. We can begin to know God more deeply, love God more affectionately, and live for God more passionately.

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1.	What are some popular thoughts or opinions about grace? What do you believe about grace?
2.	Do you think God's saving grace is frequently misunderstood? Why or why not?
3.	What three categories should we use to help us think about God's saving grace?
4.	How does thinking about God's saving grace also help us understand the Trinity?
5.	What are some other examples of ways to talk about God's saving grace?

2. Knowing the God of Grace

Last time we talked about God's saving grace, and we said that we should think about this idea in terms of God's saving grace *planned*, *purchased*, and *applied*. This helps us understand the gospel and the Trinity. We also said that God's saving grace could be summed up by the biblical statement that "salvation belongs to the LORD" (Psalm 3:8).

Let's continue our study. When we speak of God's saving grace, we must first know certain things about this gracious God. We wouldn't get very far if we each of us had completely different ideas about who God is. So when we begin to consider God's saving grace as *planned*, *purchased*, and *applied*, let us consider these three truths:

- 1. God does not need anything
- 2. God is triune
- 3. God reigns as King over all things

First, God does not need anything. Paul preached in Athens: "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything" (Acts 17:24-25). Paul preached this to idolaters who worshipped false gods they had made. But these gods were really no gods at all. In order to exist, these gods needed to be made by the idolaters. But the one true God who is "Lord of heaven and earth" does not need to be made. Indeed, He does not need anything at all.

Since God doesn't need anything, He does not have to give His saving grace to anyone. If God gives saving grace to sinners, it is not because they did something to earn it, otherwise it would not be grace. God gives saving grace not because He has to but because He wants to! God loves to give saving grace to His people. In fact, He *delights* in saving them. Indeed, He "lavishes" us with grace in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:8).

Second, God is triune. This is the biblical teaching that our one God exists as three coequal and co-eternal Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus tells his disciples that they are to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (v. 19). Jesus says we are to baptize disciples into the *one* name of God. We are to be baptized into the *one* name of the Father *and* of the Son *and* of the Holy Spirit. So while there is only one name, that name applies to three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, three Persons. Behold, the biblical teaching of the Trinity.

Since God is triune, and since "salvation belongs to our God" (Revelation 7:11), we know that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are in harmony when it comes to God's saving grace. The Father is not trying to do something different than the Son or the Spirit, and likewise for the other Persons. The idea that God's saving grace is *planned* by the Father, *purchased* by the Son, and *applied* by the Spirit helps us understand that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all doing the same thing, namely, bringing glory to God Himself by graciously saving a specific people.

Third, God reigns as King over all things. God rules from His throne in heaven, doing "all that He pleases" (Psalm 115:3). God "does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Daniel 4:34-35). He "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11), causing "all things to work together for good for those whom He calls" (Romans 8:28). Paul sums it up by saying, "from God and through God and to God are all things" (Romans 11:36).

Since God reigns as King over all things, nothing can destroy the Father's plan to save a specific people. Nothing can stop the Son from purchasing grace for that people and accomplishing God's saving purpose. And nothing can nullify the Spirit's application of saving grace. So when we say that God reigns as King over all things, what we are really saying is that He is capable of saving sinners by His grace, from the beginning, in the middle, and to the end.

1.	Why is it important to know certain things about God when talking about His saving grace?
2.	God does not need anything. What does this truth mean for His saving grace?
3.	Why is it important to know that the three Persons of the Trinity are united in their purpose to save a specific people for God's glory?
4.	God reigns as King over all things. What does this truth mean for His saving grace?
5.	How does knowing that God reigns as King over all things improve our hope?

Discussion and Reflection Questions

3. Saving Grace Defined

So far we have talked about God's saving grace as *planned by the Father*, *purchased by the Son*, and *applied by the Holy Spirit*. Thinking of grace like this helps us understand both the gospel and the Trinity. Knowing that God doesn't need anything helps us see that He gives us His saving grace freely in Jesus Christ. We don't earn it; God delights to save His people for His glory. What a great comfort that our gracious God reigns as King over all things. Nothing can thwart His promise to His people that, "I will be your God, and you shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33). Now we should define the term "saving grace" so that we can all be on the same page:

God's saving grace is His unmerited love in Jesus Christ toward those who deserve judgment. Such grace makes us spiritually alive, redeems us from our sin, and grants us eternal life with God.

We love to talk about God's saving grace. We sing about it. We tell our friends about it. We read books about it. As Christians, God's saving grace toward us in Christ is the centerpiece of our faith. The fact that we have been saved by God's grace and not by our works is the heart of Christianity. This is what sets our faith apart from every false religion. All other religions require their people to work their way toward God. But Christianity says that our God has graciously worked His way toward us in Christ.

Only Christianity boasts of a God who saves His people all by Himself. Only Christianity can provide a real solution to our weary souls. We have a Savior who has declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30). God, by the work of Christ, has fulfilled everything we need for our salvation. Nothing needs to be added to this perfect work. That's what it means that Christ's work is "finished." That's what it means for grace to be grace. No other religion can boast of this message: "It is finished." At best the message of their god is, "I've done all I can do. The rest is up to you." Their people are in some sense required to save themselves. But this

goes against the good news of Scripture: "I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior" (Isaiah 43:11).

Yet sometimes it is hard for us to wrap our heads around this reality. Our hearts struggle to embrace God's saving grace for us in Jesus Christ. Every time we fail, we immediately condemn ourselves, saying, "There's no real hope for me. How could God ever love someone like me?" When we do things well, there remains that tiny bit of doubt: "It wasn't quite good enough. *I'm* not quite good enough." We are beaten down on all sides. Quietly, if we aren't careful, the despair will overwhelm us.

And this is precisely where God meets us with His saving grace in Christ. He sees us amid our despair and brokenness. He meets us where we are. He has news for us that is genuinely good: "Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). You see, God doesn't come to us and tell us how awesome we are because if we were awesome we wouldn't need a Savior. We could be our own saviors. But the good news of Christianity is not that we are awesome but that *Christ* is awesome. In fact, that's why it's called *Christianity*: it's all about Christ, not us.

So God sees us amid our despair and brokenness. But He doesn't leave us there. Instead, "Even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5). God's saving grace makes us spiritually alive. To put it another way: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son . . . to redeem those who were under the law" (Galatians 4:4). God's saving grace redeems us from our sin. Or in the words of Jesus: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God's saving grace grants us eternal life with God.

God's saving grace is given to those who deserve judgment. Truly, once we were lost, but now we are found. Thanks be to God that we are found "in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:30). What Christ did counts for us. We could never save ourselves. But we have a God who delights to save and a powerful Savior in Jesus Christ. Let us, then, praise God for His amazing, saving grace.

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1.	How does thinking about God's saving grace as <i>planned</i> , <i>accomplished</i> , and <i>applied</i> help us understand the gospel and the Trinity?
2.	How should we define God's saving grace?
3.	According to this study, what sets Christianity apart from all false religions?
4.	Why is it so difficult for us to understand and embrace God's saving grace?
5.	Why is it actually <i>good</i> news that God alone is our savior?

4. Saving Grace Needed

God's saving grace is His unmerited love in Jesus Christ toward those who deserve judgment. Our salvation comes from God alone (cf. Psalm 3:8; 62:1). This is the reality that sets Christianity apart from all other religions. Now we can ask: why do we need God's saving grace? Since God's saving grace is His unmerited love in Jesus Christ toward those who deserve judgment, what were we like before God gave us His saving grace? Were we able to turn to Him, or did we need Him to turn us toward Himself?

We need to know what we were like before we received God's saving grace. We need to know how far God has gone in Christ to save His people. We need to see the glory and magnificence of God's saving grace against the backdrop of our sin and brokenness. It will motivate our prayer lives, increase our worship, and encourage our evangelism when we see how much God has done for us by His saving grace. We need God's saving grace because:

We are born in iniquity, dead in our trespasses, and unable to please God.

In Psalm 51, David says that he was "brought forth in iniquity" and conceived in sin (v. 5). David's basic nature is bent toward sin. This isn't something that happened over time; rather, it has characterized him since his conception.

We see in Psalm 58:3 that this applies not only to David, but to all people: "the wicked go astray from the womb." All people are born with a fundamental bent toward sin. That is why all people go astray (cf. Romans 3:23; 6:23). If you have little siblings, you know the truth: we don't need to be taught how to sin. Sin is in our very bones from the moment we are conceived. It is so easy to sin and so difficult to pursue holiness because our nature is fundamentally sinful. That's why we need God's saving grace.

And outside of Christ we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Paul says this in three different places: Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 2:5, and Colossians 2:13. The basic teaching of the

Bible is that when Adam fell into sin, all of humanity fell with him: "by the one man's [Adam's] disobedience the many were made sinners" (Romans 5:19). In the context Paul also says that Adam's sin brought death, judgment, and condemnation to all people. The result of this is that we are all dead in our trespasses and sins.

This means that we don't just need a little help. We need to be given new life. Jesus tells Nicodemus that to see or enter the Kingdom of heaven we must be "born again" (John 3:3, 7). We must be born again because we are dead. It simply is not the case that we are floundering in the ocean and all we need is for God to throw us a lifesaver. The biblical picture is that we are actually dead at the bottom of the sea. What we need ultimately is not a god who does all he can do and leaves the rest up to us; we need Jesus Christ to swim to the bottom and rescue us from our hopeless estate. We need God's saving grace because without it we would remain lifeless at the bottom of the sea.

As unpopular as it may be today, the Bible also clearly teaches that outside of Christ we are unable to please God. Paul says that "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it *cannot*. Those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God" (Romans 8:7-8, emphasis added). This means that all of us, before we received God's saving grace in Christ, had no ability to do what was pleasing to God. Sure, we might do things which are helpful to others and look very good. But at the end of the day, we cannot escape the real meaning of Paul's words here. The reason that we need God's saving grace is not only because we cannot save ourselves, but also because apart from Christ we cannot do anything which pleases God.

At this point you may be wondering: Is there any good news? The short answer is *yes*, as we've briefly discussed. But for now let us wrestle through the implications of the bad news. This won't be the final word in our study, but it is still an important part of it. If we don't know who we were before we were saved, we will not be able to rejoice fully in God's saving grace. We will misunderstand how God saves His people if we don't see ourselves as totally lifeless and without hope apart from Christ. And if we don't understand that our "souls cling to the dust," we won't be able to ask God to "give us life according to Your word" (Psalm 119:25).

Di	scussion and Reflection Questions
1.	How does understanding our need for God's saving grace help us better understand that very grace?
2.	What does it mean that we are born with a fundamental bent toward sin?
3.	What does it mean that apart from Christ we are dead in our trespasses and sins?
4.	What does it mean that apart from Christ we are unable to please God?

5. How might our prayer, worship, and evangelism be enhanced by this understanding of our

need for God's saving grace?

5. Saving Grace Planned by the Father

In our study over the last few weeks we've been talking about God's saving grace. We've talked about the nature and character of our gracious God. We've defined "saving grace" as God's unmerited love in Christ toward those who deserve judgment. And last week we talked about why we need God's saving grace: because of our fall into sin we are born in iniquity, dead in our trespasses, and unable to please God.

At this point we can finally consider the biblical teaching that saving grace is planned by the Father. When we talk about saving grace in this way we mean:

God has an eternal plan to save His people in Jesus Christ, making them holy and blameless and adopting them into His family.

This way of thinking about God's saving grace helps us understand that God's love for us comes before our love for Him. In the words of John, "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This also helps us understand that God's love for us is not dependent upon us. God doesn't save us because He was required to but because He delights to save us.

This is what Paul has in mind when he says, "God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (2 Timothy 1:9). We've already talked about the fact that we are saved by God's grace alone and not our works. But notice also the fact that we are saved "because of His own purpose and grace."

There is a link between God's saving grace and God's saving purpose. God's purpose, His eternal plan, is to save sinners by His grace, and He gives them that grace in Christ not after they've done something to deserve it but "before the ages began," before they were even born. If we are to rightly understand God's saving grace, we must embrace this biblical truth.

Paul also says that God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him" (Ephesians 1:4). Here again we see the truth that God's saving grace is planned. The fact that God's people are chosen in Christ "before the foundation of the world" signals to us that God has a specific plan to save a specific people. God's plan is to save His people by His grace in Jesus Christ. And He doesn't save us because we are holy and blameless but "that we should be." So God's saving grace is both planned and powerful. It not only saves us but also transforms us.

Paul then says, "God predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:5). Don't let the *p-word* scare you off from this magnificent truth. When the Bible talks about predestination and election, what it's usually saying is that God's saving grace for us is planned and powerful. It's just the Bible's way of telling us that God's love for us is deeper than we could have ever dreamed. So deep, in fact, that it doesn't even depend upon us.

The truths of predestination and election are the Bible's way of saying that God delights in saving His people, not because we are awesome but because He is awesome. He is free and able to save us by His grace for us in Jesus Christ. And God doesn't save us recklessly or without thinking. Rather, He saves us intentionally and in accordance with "the purpose of His will" (Ephesians 1:5).

Put together, then, what all this means is that God's saving love for us in Christ is genuinely gracious. God doesn't love us because we deserve to be loved. We saw last week that we don't deserve to be loved; we deserve to be damned. But the good news of God's saving grace is that His love for us does not depend upon us. God has loved us from all eternity in Christ. He has chosen to set His saving love upon us, upon undeserving rebels. So when we talk about God's saving grace as planned, we mean that God will stop at nothing to save us in Christ, to make us holy and blameless, and to adopt us into His family.

Discussion and Reflection Questions	
1.	How have we defined God's "saving grace" so far in this study?
2.	How does the biblical teaching that God gave us saving grace in Christ "before the ages began" help us understand the nature of His saving grace?
3.	Why is it important to keep in mind that we are chosen before the foundation of the world in Christ?
4.	What does the Bible usually mean when it talks about predestination and election? How are these things an encouragement to God's people?
5.	How might our prayers, worship, and evangelism be strengthened by the biblical teaching that God's saving grace is planned?

6. Saving Grace Purchased by the Son

In our study we've talked about God's saving grace as planned, purchased, and applied. Today we are going to focus on what it means for God's saving grace to be purchased by the Son. Here's a definition of what we mean:

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not a potential Savior but an actual one. He atoned for our sin and was cursed for us so that we would be redeemed from the penalty of the law.

The first thing we need to see is that the Bible teaches that Christ is an actual Savior. The reason that Jesus' name is "Jesus," according to Matthew, is because "he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The work of Christ doesn't just make it possible for us to be saved, but it really, genuinely saves us. Paul says as much in Romans 5:9: "We have now been justified by Christ's blood." This means we have been made right with God because of the death of Christ. We don't just have the opportunity to be made right with Him, but we have actually been made right. When Christ says, "It is finished" (John 19:30) upon the cross, he means that he has done everything necessary to save us. Nothing needs to be added. It is enough.

We see this in Isaiah 53 as well. There the prophet says that the Messiah "was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace" (v. 5). The point of this verse is that our Savior took our sins upon himself and that in doing so he actually brought us peace with God. Then we read that "it was the will of the LORD to crush him; He has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring" (v. 10). This means that when Christ dies, when he makes an offering for guilt, his death guarantees that he will see his offspring. Put another way: when Christ dies, he actually saves his people. He takes their sin, makes an offering for their guilt, and brings them peace.

The fact that God's saving grace is purchased by the Son means that Jesus is an actual savior who atones for our sin. This means that his death brings us back to God. As Revelation

5:9 puts it, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God." Here we see that Christ's atonement is powerful. It is so powerful, in fact, that it redeems and ransoms people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. The blood of Christ brings near those "who were once far off" (Ephesians 2:13). And by his death he has reconciled us "to God in one body through the cross" (Ephesians 2:16). That's what it means that Christ atones for our sin. Through his death, he takes away our sin and brings us back to God.

And not only is Christ an actual savior, not only does his death bring us back to God, but we need to say that on the cross he bore the curse that we deserve. This is the very heart of the gospel, that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). What happened on the cross was not merely Jesus dying at the hands of sinful, wicked men, although that is certainly true (cf. Acts 4:27-28). At the deepest level, what happened at the cross is that "God put Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood" (Romans 3:25). Propitiation means that Christ satisfied the wrath of God on our behalf by taking the curse that we deserve. God is for us now because He gave up Christ for us (cf. Romans 8:32).

So here's our conclusion. When we say that saving grace is purchased by the Son, what we really mean is that Jesus is not a hypothetical savior but an actual one. We don't just mean that he has made salvation possible, but that he has made salvation actual for his people. We don't just mean that he has made a way for us to be saved, but that he himself *is* the way (cf. John 14:6). We don't just mean that he gave himself up for people in a general sense, but that he gave himself up for the church in order to make her holy and blameless before himself (cf. Ephesians 5:25-27). We don't just mean that he died to give us a choice to be saved, but that as the good shepherd he died to bring us, his sheep, into his flock (cf. John 10:15-16). Praise be to God that every believer can say, "Christ loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Discussion and Reflection Questions	
1.	What does it mean that saving grace is purchased by the Son?
2.	Why is it important to know that Christ actually, not just potentially, saves?
3.	What does "atonement" mean? What did Christ's death on the cross do?
4.	What is the heart of the gospel?
5.	How might our prayer, worship, and work of missions be improved in light of the biblical teaching concerning saving grace as purchased by the Son?

7. Saving Grace Applied by the Holy Spirit, Part One

Today we are going to talk about what it means for God's saving grace to be applied by the Holy Spirit. When we think about this aspect of our salvation, we need to think about it in two different parts: first, we need to think about it in terms of the Spirit's work to make us alive with Christ; second, we need to think about it in terms of the Spirit's work to keep us in Christ. Today we will consider the first part. Here's what we mean by the first aspect of saving grace as applied by the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is both free and powerful to cause sinners to be born again, granting them repentance and faith in Christ.

That the Spirit is free and powerful to cause sinners to be born again means He can grant us new life in Christ by His sovereign power. In John 3, Jesus says that one cannot see or enter the kingdom of God "unless one is born again" (vv. 3, 7). So part of the Spirit's work in salvation is that He grants us new life. We need to be born again because all of us by nature are dead in our sins (cf. Ephesians 2:1). Thus, we didn't just need God to help us out a little bit; we needed Him to give us new life by His Spirit.

We see this in John 3: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (v. 6). The flesh cannot cause itself to be born again; only the Spirit can do that. Then Jesus says, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (v. 8). Therefore, the Spirit is free and powerful to make us alive.

In Ephesians 2 we see that God "made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved" (v. 5). What it means to be saved by grace is that we are made alive with Christ. And this work is not done in cooperation with sinners; rather, it is a sovereign act of the Spirit. Since those who are made alive with Christ were formerly dead in their sins (v. 1), they could not have made themselves alive.

This is made even more clear by 2 Corinthians 4:6: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Just as God created the universe all by Himself and without our help, so too He saves people by all by Himself and without our help. He does this not by forcing us to believe against our will, but by giving us a sight of His glory in Christ through His Word. Seeing such glory, glory that we were created to see, inevitably causes us to turn to Him in repentance and faith.

These things, repentance and faith in Christ, are gifts granted to us by the Holy Spirit. In 2 Timothy 2:24-25, Paul says, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone . . . correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth." The point here is that God is the one who grants repentance.

Then in Ephesians 2:8, Paul says, "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." Our salvation is all of grace; therefore, even faith itself must be a gift of God. This is also seen in Philippians 1:29 when Paul says, "It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake." God is the one who grants us faith. After we have done all we can do in ministry, the decisive factor in whether someone repents and believes is ultimately whether God grants them repentance and faith.

What it means for God's saving grace to be applied by the Spirit is that God is the one who makes sinners alive in Christ, granting them repentance and faith. In practical terms, this should make us both rejoice in the God of our salvation and humble before Him. We rejoice because it is God alone, by His sovereign grace, who saves us, grants us new life, repentance, and faith in Christ. We are humble because at the end of the day the only difference between those who believe and those who don't is a five-letter word called *grace*. We aren't Christians because we are smarter than non-believers or because we got all of our theological ducks in a row or even because we got luckier than them. We are Christians, praise God, because God made us Christians.

Discussion and Reflection Questions	
1.	How did we define the first aspect of understanding God's saving grace as applied by the Spirit?
2.	What does it mean to be born again? What role does the sinner play in this process?
3.	Is it a comfort to know that God grants repentance and faith? Why or why not?
4.	How does the truth of regeneration make us both joyful in God and humble?

5. What is the only difference between those who believe and those who don't?

8. Saving Grace Applied by the Holy Spirit, Part Two

Today we will continue our study of what it means for God's saving grace to be applied. Here's a definition of what we mean by the second aspect of this topic:

True believers will persevere in faith to the end because God Himself will preserve them.

Christians cannot lose their salvation because God saves us by His grace. We didn't earn our salvation, and therefore we can't lose it. God's saving grace isn't just this *thing* that God gives to us and hopes we never lose. Rather, as we've talked about before, His saving grace is His unmerited love in Jesus Christ toward those who deserve judgment. This love grants us eternal life with God. Thus, we can never be lost.

The most famous verse in the Bible teaches this: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Those who truly believe *will not* perish but have *eternal* life. If we lost our salvation, we would not, in fact, have eternal life. We would perish. But the text is clear: those who truly believe in Christ will not lose their salvation.

Paul sums this up when he says, "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). This list includes literally everything. And Paul says that nothing here can make God change His mind about His love for us in Christ. We cannot lose our salvation because God will never stop loving His people.

If we lost our salvation, then Christ would not be a faithful savior. He would not be the good shepherd. In John 6:38-39, Jesus says, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day." If we lost our salvation, Christ would be a failure when it comes to doing the will of God.

Christ also says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). If we lost our salvation, Christ would not be a good shepherd. But the text says that no one will snatch them out of his hand. It says that God the Father is "greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:29).

Paul says that the Holy Spirit "is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Ephesians 1:14). And Peter says that "God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). Put together we see both that the Holy Spirit guarantees that we will be saved and also that God Himself guards us for salvation.

All in all, the ultimate reason that we cannot lose our salvation is because God Himself holds us in His hand. We can trust in the promises of God because He is "greater than all." We have "strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us" precisely because of the "unchangeable character of God's purpose" to save His people (Hebrews 6:17-18). He only is our "rock and our salvation, our fortress" (Psalm 62:6). We can take great comfort in the fact that no matter what happens to us in our lives, regardless of what we're going through, God Himself is our treasure (cf. Psalm 27:4), the One who keeps us to the very end (cf. Psalm 62:7).

The most fitting conclusion for our study of God's saving grace applied is Jude 1:24-25: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

Di	Discussion and Reflection Questions	
1.	In this study, how did we define the second aspect of God's saving grace applied?	
2.	If God's saving grace isn't a <i>thing</i> , what is it?	
3.	Can anything separate us from the love of God in Christ? How do we know?	
4.	What effect does Christ being the good shepherd have on our view of God's grace?	
5.	God is able to keep us from stumbling, to present us blameless before Himself. How does this increase our trust in Him? How does this affect our worship and missions?	

9. Prayer, Worship, and Missions in Light of God's Saving Grace

Now, in our final study of God's saving grace, we should consider some practical applications. How exactly does a correct understanding of God's grace help us in the Christian life? What does God's saving grace mean for our prayers, our worship, and our work of missions? This will be the focus of this study.

First, we pray to a sovereign God. We don't pray to a passive bystander who simply watches reality pass by before his eyes with no plan for or control over the situation. Rather, we pray to the God who "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). He is not aloof or uninterested from what goes on in His creation. He cares for all things such that not even a bird falls from a tree apart from His sovereign will (cf. Matthew 10:29). God truly is concerned with even the smallest details of our lives, and He is powerful to work everything for our good (cf. Romans 8:28).

Also, our prayers for our unbelieving friends and family reveal that we believe in God's absolute sovereignty. We ask God to save our loved ones, knowing that He is free and powerful to do what we ask. We don't ask God to help people save themselves; we ask Him to save them by His grace alone. This gives us hope for the salvation of our loved ones. God really can save them. Even those who appear to be the most hostile toward God cannot outrun His saving grace forever. If God desires to save someone, they will be saved, for "our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases" (Psalm 115:3).

Second, we worship God for God's glory: "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory, for the sake of Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness" (Psalm 115:1). God's love and faithfulness towards us is why we give Him alone the glory. God alone deserves the glory for our salvation because He alone planned, purchased, and applied it. We did nothing to deserve it, and we rely completely upon Him for it.

Furthermore, we worship a God who really, actually saves sinners. We don't worship a god who enabled us to save ourselves, but the God who genuinely saves us by His grace. We sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that *saved* a wretch like me." God's amazing grace doesn't just make it possible for us to be saved; it actually saves us. Worship should be Godcentered and not man-centered because it's all about Him and not us. When we worship, our

primary concern should not be what is most popular or what will attract the most people, but rather how God would have us worship Him. And God requires us to worship Him in "spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Third, God's saving grace produces both humility and boldness in our work of missions. We know that God is the one who saves, not us. Therefore, we should be humble and rely upon the methods that God has given in Scripture, like preaching the gospel. We don't need to invent things like the sinner's prayer, which is not a biblical idea, for people to be saved because we aren't the ones who are doing the saving.

But we are also bold in our proclamation of the gospel. God is free and powerful to save, and sinners will be saved when we preach the gospel as God has commanded. The success of missions doesn't rely upon our work, but upon God's. Jesus says, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Since Christ has all authority, we are bold in our work of missions.

In conclusion, we pray to a sovereign God. We take comfort in God's absolute control over His creation. Nothing slips through His fingers, and He is capable of accomplishing all His purpose. We worship a God who truly saves. We rest in the work of Christ for us. By it, we are really saved. And we declare the gospel, the power of God unto salvation (cf. Romans 1:16), to all the nations. We are humble in our work of missions. We water, but it is "God who gives the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:7). And we are bold. Our work will be successful because Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (cf. Matthew 28:18-20). We will make disciples of all the nations not because of anything special we can do, but because Christ is with us "to the end of the age" (v. 20).

Discussion and Reflection Questions	
1.	How do our prayers reveal that we believe in the absolute sovereignty of God?
2.	How does God's sovereignty give us hope for our unbelieving friends and family?
3.	Why should worship be God-centered rather than man-centered?
4.	In the work of missions, what is the relationship between God's sovereignty on the one hand and our humility and boldness on the other?
5.	Can we have hope that the church's work of missions will be ultimately successful? Why or why not?

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