

LESSON 2:

What is the Goal of our Salvation?

I. Introduction and Review

In the previous lesson we saw that the Bible talks about salvation in broader terms than simply “Jesus dying on the cross” or “God forgiving our sins,” as important as those things are. This panorama of salvation is laid out in the twin notions of the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) and *historia salutis* (history of salvation). We also talked about ways in which we can get the Gospel wrong in terms of mischaracterization, truncation, and addition. Getting the Gospel wrong is a serious thing, as we were reminded by the Apostle Paul’s warning in Galatians 1:6-9. In this lesson, we will look at God’s purpose for man, which sets the basis for why God extended salvation to mankind after Adam fell. Keeping this end goal in mind will help us understand salvation coherently.

II. The Covenant as Intrinsic to Salvation

Most Christians, when they think about creation and salvation, do not immediately default to think in covenantal terms, but arguably the covenant should be considered as the connection between creation, salvation, and man’s final (i.e., eschatological) end. The Westminster Confession of Faith (7.1) says,

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

As a reminder, in the ancient world, a covenant was a legally binding arrangement between two sovereign rulers regulating the relationship between them and containing blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Often, covenants were between an overlord or suzerain king and a vassal king.

- From the vassal’s perspective, a covenant stipulates obligations—for example, to defend the honor of the great king, to give him tribute, and to provide material support to the great king’s activities.

Preparation

1. How would you describe what a covenant is?

Observation

2. How does WCF 7.1 describe God’s covenants with man?

- A covenant provides blessings as well, such as the suzerain granting the vassal enlarged dominions, defense if attacked, shared honor, and an assurance that he will not deal wrongfully with the vassal.

The Confession describes the covenant between God and man as a “voluntary condescension” so that mankind could have “fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward” (WCF 7.1). Man, thus, was made to be in covenant with God. There were two aspects of this that are important here: (1) Man was made to glorify God by bearing and reflecting God’s image; and (2) Man was made to be in fellowship and communion with God. Let us use the confessional standards to explore each of these in turn. Our focus in this lesson will be on what the standards call the Covenant of Works (WCF 7.1) or, better, the Covenant of Life (WCF 20).

Observation

3. What four items do the Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms all mention about man’s original state? How do these qualities reflect God’s image?

A. Man as God’s Image-Bearer

The Confession of Faith and both Catechisms note that God made Adam in God’s own image, with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (WCF 4.2, WLC 17, WSC 10). It is worth reflecting for a moment what these qualities entailed.

- **Holiness.** Commonly speaking, this means to be set apart or consecrated, as well as to exhibit purity and integrity. Both senses of the term apply to man’s original state. He was set apart from creation to bear God’s image and possessed a particular dignity in that role. Man had integrity within himself, which we see when it was lost after man’s sin caused him to be ashamed. Man’s affections and emotions would have been ordered to the right ends in the right balance; there would not have been any inner conflicts for mankind.
- **Knowledge.** Adam’s knowledge was not exhaustive, but he rightly understood everything in the proper context because his understanding was framed by recognizing God as the creator and sustainer of all things, to whom he owed perfect and personal obedience and fidelity (WCF 7.2). The Confession (WCF 4.2) and the Larger Catechism (WLC 17) both note that God’s law was written onto man’s heart. This knowledge is foundation. We do not have such an understanding now, because we are consistently self-centered and only understand things in part. As a result, we consistently have a skewed picture of reality.
- **Righteousness.** To be righteous is to be rightly related to some standard. In this case, the standard was God Himself. Man would have glorified God by exercising his gifts as God’s image bearer. Dominion over creation was

not exploitation; it was representing God to creation and creation back to God in worship. Had Adam not sinned, his descendants would have been rightly related to God, their environment, and each other. As people exercised their will in obedience to God, their righteousness would have become habituated; as they bore children and exercised dominion over creation, God's image would have expanded across creation.

B. Man as Being in Communion with God

Note that how WCF 4.2 describes man's relationship with God in the original state: they "were happy in their communion with God." One gets a sense of this communion in how God is bringing the animals to Adam to name, in making a helpmeet for him, and in coming to him in the cool of the day to meet with him (Gen. 2:18-25, 3:8). Man was made for relationship with God, and this communion was not only a duty but was intended to be enjoyable. People crave intimacy. This intimacy is closer than anything we can imagine. The One who created us and knows better than anyone wants to commune with us. See how Paul describes this in Phil. 3:8-11:

Yet indeed I also count all these things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Before the Fall, Adam had communion with God without suffering, and the Tree of Life in the Garden held out the prospect of even greater communion, to be confirmed in eternal life (Gen. 3:22-24). This Tree of Life reappears in Revelation 22:1-5:

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river was the Tree of Life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month, the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

Observation

4. How does the Genesis 1-3 account suggest man was in communion with God? How does WCF 7.2 characterize man's relationship with God before the Fall?

What was held out for Adam is also held out for us, his posterity: communion and intimacy. Jesus, on the night that He was betrayed, prayed:

I do not pray for these [disciples] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they also may be one, as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:20-23)

C. The Chief and Highest End of Man

At this point, we need to pull some threads together. Man, as made in God's image, was intended to glorify God. Indeed, the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:36 says, "*For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.*" Man, being in communion with God, was to enjoy God. This all means that man's "chief and highest end" (as WLC 1 puts it) is "to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever." This dual purpose, as outlined with New Testament texts, refers not only to man's situation after the Fall and after the coming of Christ, but were part of God's original purpose for man. Indeed, these goals are codified in the creational covenant. This is vital to keep in mind because the end point of man's salvation was not to foster man's flourishing or happiness per se, but rather, to restore the image of God in man that had been marred by the Fall and to restore man to communion with His creator. The goals are the same, but the means to them after the Fall have changed. Before the Fall, the promise of the Tree of Life could only be secured by Adam's personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience (WLC 20), hence why this creational covenant is also termed the Covenant of Works. After the Fall, they can only be secured by the work of the Second Adam, Christ Jesus, in the Covenant of Grace. The Fall ultimately is so tragic because man's stature was originally so high and so good.

Observation

5. What does the first question in both the Larger and Shorter Catechism describe man's ultimate purpose as being?

Reflection

6. People today do not view man as being made in God's image. Has that elevated or lowered man's dignity? Explain.

7. How does this understanding of man's purpose compare with that held by people today? How might this

