

Introduction

Not long ago, I saw a t-shirt that pictured a hockey goalie and a puck bouncing off his glove. The goalie had the standard face of Jesus and by him were the words, "**Jesus saves.**" That t-shirt, no matter how tacky it is, does express the essence of the gospel message. Jesus saves! But do you know what it means that He does? If you're like most Christians, you don't. Some truths are so well known that they're unknown. No one ever explains them in detail. I'm going to rectify that today though. I'm going to explain in detail what it means that Jesus saves and what we should do because He does.

Our Status Not In Jesus

I begin with the word "**condemnation**" in verse 1. That word delineates our status if we aren't "**in Christ Jesus.**" We're condemned. We're objectively guilty before God. Verse 4 explains why we are. We've violated the requirements of the Law (God's moral law in the Bible).

Let me clarify that by way of analogy. Title 29 of the Ohio Revised Code is the State of Ohio's criminal Law. If I violate any of its regulations, I offend the State of Ohio and become objectively guilty before it. I'm a criminal and must be punished. In the same way, the Bible is God's moral Law. If I violate any of its regulations (commandments), I offend God and become objectively guilty before Him. I'm a sinner and must be punished. Let's particularize that.

Section 2911.32 of the Ohio Revised Code establishes this criminal regulation: "**No person shall . . . Insert or deposit a slug in a coin machine, with purpose to defraud. Whoever violates this section is *guilty of using slugs, a misdemeanor of the second degree.***"

Sections 2929.24 and 2929.28 set the punishment for a second-degree misdemeanor: imprisonment for "**not more than ninety days**" and/or a fine of "**not more than seven hundred fifty dollars.**" Suppose I get caught knowingly inserting a slug in the soda machine at Marc's. I'm

condemned and have to pay: up to 90 days in jail and/or a \$750 fine.

Similarly, Matthew 6:1 establishes this moral law, **“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.”** Romans 6:23 records the punishment for doing so, **“For the wages of sin is death.”** It’s spiritual and psychological death - now, on earth, and forever, in hell. Suppose I fast for two days and tell you I did so that you’ll admire me. I’m condemned and have to pay: spiritual and psychological death, now and forever.

That then is our status if we are not in Christ Jesus. We’re condemned and must be punished because we are.

Our Status In Jesus

But notice our status if we are in Christ Jesus. According to verse 1, it’s **“no condemnation.”** We aren’t condemned, aren’t objectively guilty before God. In His eyes, we’re utterly innocent instead.

Another legal analogy helps explain that. It’s what is called an expungement statute, Section 2953.32 of the Ohio Revised Code. Suppose that I’m found guilty of inserting the slug in Marc’s soda machine. Also suppose that I don’t commit any crimes for the next three years and then apply to the court to have my record sealed. If the court approves my application, **“The proceedings in the case shall be considered not to have occurred and the conviction shall be sealed.”** The words **“considered”** and **“sealed”** show what happens. The State of Ohio expunges my crime from its records. It considers it as not having taken place. As far as it’s concerned, I never committed it.

What happens to criminals legally happens to sinners spiritually when we’re in Christ Jesus. Father God expunges our sins. He considers them as not having taken place. As far as He’s concerned, we never committed them. I counseled a young woman who had broken off her relationship with her boyfriend but not before having had sex with him. She was now racked with guilt and lamented **“the loss of my virginity.”** I didn’t minimize the sin but I did articulate the hope she had. It’s

called **“secondary virginity.”** If she is in Christ Jesus, God considers her sexual sin as not having taken place. As far as He’s concerned, she never committed it and is a virgin. That illustrates our status if we’re in Christ Jesus. We aren’t condemned and won’t be punished.

Verses 3-4 explain why we aren’t. Verse 3 alludes to “the finished work of Jesus”: His virgin birth, perfect life, substitutionary death, and historical resurrection. Verse 4 discloses what His work achieved. It fulfilled all the requirements of the Law in us. Based on it, God can and does perceive us as having always obeyed all of His commandments in the Bible. As far as He’s concerned, we’ve always done everything the Bible tells us to do and have never once done anything it tells us not to do. That isn’t the case but He considers it to be and thus, we’re no longer condemned and punished. That’s our status if we’re in Christ Jesus.

In the Flesh

But it isn’t just our status that being in Christ Jesus changes. It’s our state as well. By “our state,” I mean our inner condition.

Notice a word that Paul uses in verses 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, **“flesh”**. In those verses, it refers to fallen nature with which we’re born. When I say **“nature,”** I mean our inner dimensions – our thoughts, feelings, will, and bodily habits. When I say **“fallen”**, I mean egocentric. So, we’re born with mental, emotional, volitional, and bodily inclinations, even compulsions, to act self-centeredly, to act as if we’re more important than everyone else is. Or to say it another way, a systematic readiness to do evil in order to get what we desire or need resides in us. That’s to what the clause **“walk according to the flesh”** in verse 4 refers. We act as the inclinations and compulsions of our fallen nature direct.

The result is the soap-opera life we see all around us. Paul himself describes that life in Galatians 5:19-21. It’s one of **“immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.”** Examples abound.

Not long ago, a nurse told me that there is constant tension between the nurses on her floor. One of the many causes of that tension is a common practice – putting off unpleasant tasks long enough so that the next shift of nurses has to do them. The nurses who do that are walking according to the flesh. There's a readiness to do evil in them.

That is just a microcosm of the soap opera life we see all around us. Our personal daily worlds are filled with people whose fallen natures incline or even compel them to speak and act destructively. The problem is their state. They're **"in the flesh."**

Our State In Jesus

But being in Christ Jesus changes our state.

Notice the word **"Spirit"** in verses 4, 5, 6, and 9 and the phrases **"the Spirit of God"** and **"the Spirit of Christ"** in verse 10. They refer to the third person of God, the Holy Spirit.

Now, verses 9 and 10 reveal that the Holy Spirit does two things if we're in Christ Jesus. Look at the word **"spirit"** (small "s") in verse 10. The Greek word translated that connotes the immaterial part of us. The *New Bible Dictionary* defines it as **"the seat of perception, feeling, and will."** It's what I called earlier **"our inner dimensions"** – our thoughts, feelings, will, and bodily habits. Anyway, the Holy Spirit does two things with regard to our spirit if we're in Christ Jesus.

First, according to verse 9, He dwells in us. That's the defining difference between those who aren't in Christ Jesus and those who are. If we aren't in Him, the Holy Spirit does not dwell in us. If we are, He does. He inhabits our inner dimensions, literally not metaphorically.

But the Holy Spirit doesn't just dwell in our inner dimensions. Verse 10 teaches that He transforms their nature as well. He makes them **"alive because of righteousness."** In an ongoing and never-ending process, He makes them less and less egocentric and more and more Christo-centric. They increasingly incline us, therefore, to speak and act as Jesus did, righteously instead of selfishly. We become different

persons as a result, what Paul called **“new creatures in Christ.”**

What I’m describing here is a profound psychological change. You know, it’s time that we as pastors, teachers, and Christians make a crucial connection - between the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in us and psychological reality. For far too long, we’ve been hesitant to do so. Pastors, for instance, preach boldly about our change of status but haltingly about our change of state. They speak confidently about being forgiven but timidly about being like Jesus.

Consider a Friends pastor who told me that he no longer uses the word sanctification in his preaching. Sanctification is the Holy Spirit’s ongoing transformation of our inner dimensions. When I asked him why he no longer uses that word, he replied, **“It creates high expectations that people don’t live up to and then guilt when they don’t.”** Read between the lines. It isn’t just that he doesn’t use the word sanctification. It’s that he doesn’t speak the reality behind it either.

But we need to in our preaching, teaching, and counseling. When people come to us with depression, anger, anxiety, fear, and so on, there’s nothing wrong with using or suggesting psychological resources and technique to help. But at the same time, we shouldn’t neglect the Holy Spirit’s transforming work or make it secondary. It’s primary in people finding the psychological reality they seek. The words **“life and peace”** in verse 6 drive that point home. The only way human beings will attain the condition of life we all seek – one of pervasive and habitual love, peace, and joy - is through the Holy Spirit’s work in us.

You now know what most Christians don’t – what it means that Jesus saves. It means that He changes our status from “condemned” to “not condemned” and our state from “in the flesh” to “in the Spirit.”

In Christ Jesus

But He only does so, according to verse 1, if we’re **“in”** Him. The phrase, **“you in Christ,”** has a counterpart that Paul frequently uses, **“Christ in you.”** He uses it, for instance, in this text in verse 10.

That's why so many preachers, teachers, and Christians talk about it.

But Paul's favorite image was "**You in Christ.**" In the phrase, "**Christ in you,**" we're the reference point and He is making the movement into us. But in the phrase, "**You in Christ,**" Jesus is the reference point and we're making the movement into Him.

Which is exactly what we have to do in order for He to change our status and state. We have to move into Him. I've heard preachers say, "**Don't put Jesus on the periphery of your life.**" But what they should say is, "**Don't put your self on the periphery of Jesus' life.**" We should move into the center of His life instead and be with Him.

Paul explains how we do that in verses 5 and 6. He identifies two approaches to human life here. One is to set our minds on the things of the flesh, which exclude Jesus. That means that we think about nothing in terms of Him. The other is to set our minds on the things of the Spirit, which focus on Jesus. That means that we think about everything in terms of Him. We do two things as a practical matter. First, we learn as much as we can about the person, life, and teachings of Jesus. And second, we perceive, reason, analyze, interpret, and think about everything in light of what we've learned. The result is that we take Jesus primarily into account in everything we experience and do.

A Christian attorney I know bills clients on the basis of what they can pay because He thinks that's what Jesus would do if He were an attorney. A young Christian I know won't wear clothes that she'd be embarrassed to wear in front of Jesus. A finally ill Christian I knew remained joyous in the face of death because of what Jesus taught about it. They illustrate what it means for you and I to be "**in Christ Jesus.**" We take Him primarily into account in everything we experience and do.

Conclusion

So, be in Christ Jesus. That's our call today. Move into the center of His life and be with Him. It won't be, "**Jesus saves**" if we do. It will be, "**Jesus saves me.**"