

Confession and Confirmation of Faith
Eph 2:1-10, Rom 10:9-10

Friends, if we were to ask a question - in regards to that last passage of scripture which we just read... *“Are you saved... and what exactly does that mean?”*

My hunch is that the vast majority of people – both Christian and non-Christian – would probably give an answer that in some way boils it all down and reduces “being saved” to a matter of whether or not they will go to heaven after they die.

And in many ways this sort of response would be like answering the question *“Are you married... and what exactly does that mean?”* by saying *“yes and it means I get to have sex with my spouse!”*

Now this is certainly true – but we all know that what it means to be married encompasses much more than that.

But imagine for a moment, that in spite of its shortcomings, we were to use this very narrow explanation of what it means

to be married as the basis for pre-marriage counselling and preparation... or this is what we would tell our children and young people it means to be married...

I think we can all see how ridiculous that would be and how poorly we would end up preparing people for the reality of what it means to be married and remain married.

Yet in many ways, over the past several decades, because of our inherent pragmatism and tendency to want to simplify things down to what’s most important - the church in North America has offered a very narrow explanation of what it means to be saved – going to heaven after you die... and has boiled down the whole process of discipleship into a singularly focused activity of *“getting people saved.”*

And the result is that we have not adequately prepared people for the realities of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ for the rest of their lives – for the period of time before they die – (when they can cash in their salvation ticket and to go to heaven instead of hell.)

And we can see the results of this when we find out that the divorce rate among Christians is about the same as among non-Christians, that Christians struggle with materialism and greed and a lack of compassion and unwillingness to help the poor - just as much as non-Christians, that Christians attitudes and opinions on sexual morals and lifestyles are rapidly changing to accept and accommodate what our culture has recently proclaimed to be acceptable...

These among other things are not what we would expect to find among those who have been discipled to follow Jesus Christ and obey everything that He taught us.

Now I know that when we hear such things, our immediate reaction is to say *“this isn’t good – we have to do something about it, we have to fix this situation and correct it!”*

But brothers and sisters, I think that sort of reaction is probably what caused us to boil down the discipleship process to begin with - and narrow our focus on all those “unsaved

people” who need to get saved because their eternal destiny is at stake.

However - instead of reacting and focusing on issues that are really just symptomatic, we need to address the deeper underlying problem that our working understanding of being saved needs to encompass much more than simply going to heaven when we die, and that our discipleship process has to reflect this.

So to continue with the marriage analogy, in many ways we can understand the process of making disciples to be similar to the process by which becoming married is the result of dating and courting and being engaged... and continues on as you and your spouse live life together and raise a family and go through the good times and bad times and so on...

And so far, according to this analogy, we’ve looked at steps 1 through 4 which are the equivalent of how a relationship starts because of dating, and continues and grows deeper because courting and leads being engaged...

And this would be us GOing OUT and making credible connections with people in our community, we need to connect them to Christ to meet their spiritual thirst, connect them to the Congregation, grafting them in, so that relationship can take root and bear fruit...

And of course we have expectations that the people who we are working to disciple will then settle into this congregation and we will do life and ministry together – celebrating the good times and supporting each other during the bad times and our connection and Christian fellowship in the Holy Spirit will grow deeper over the years... just like a well-married couple.

But can you imagine going from that state of dating, and courting and being engaged and transitioning into being married and all that it entails without actually getting married?

Without actually having a legal ceremony where vows are made and you enter into the bond of marriage by saying I do...

If that is the case brothers and sisters – for as much as you have dated and courted and you enjoy doing life together with a special someone – even going through good times and bad times together – you may be connected but you are not actually married.

Regardless of the kind of relationship someone has with another person, if you ask them *“are you married?”* and they have not had a legal formal ceremony to mark that – they will say no.

And if you reflect on this kind of situation friends – I think you gain a better or broader understanding and perhaps a refocused importance of the question *“Are you saved?”*

It’s not so much a question of whether you will go to heaven when you die, but rather it’s about whether or not a you have moved from the state of being “unsaved” to the state of being “saved” just as you would transition from the status of being single to the status of being married through saying “I do.”

And going to heaven is just one of the blessings and benefits which results from this change in status.

So what this means, brothers and sisters is that at some point in the discipleship process we have to be intentional about helping and asking people to make and mark that transition formally and not just assume that somehow it will occur on its own - and this is what happens in Step #5; Confession and Confirmation of Faith.

Now we know what is involved when we shift our status from single to married – we have to change our name, we get a joint bank account, we have to register our marriage with the gov't and so on- but what is involved when our state of being moves from being unsaved to saved?

Well... without being simplistic, the Apostle Paul offers us a very good summary of that in Ephesians 2:1-10, and this can also function as a guide for what sort of content a Confession and Confirmation of Faith needs to include.

Just as a wedding ceremony needs to include specific content in order to summarize and reflect what is actually happening in moving from being single to married and what that entails... so to, a Confession and Confirmation of Faith also needs to include specific content to reflect the shift which actually takes place and shows that a disciple adequately understands what has happened to them, and what their new state of “being saved” requires of them from this point forward.

And of course as we look at this – it is helpful to look at our own progress in the discipleship process to determine if this is something we have also completed or perhaps still need to complete.

So, let's look seven points from Ephesians 2:1-10 with regards to confessing and confirming our faith, starting with vs 1 “*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...*”

So the first point is admitting that you were dead, and death implies a separation of relationship, it implies powerlessness; it means that you do not have life in you.

Now all of this seems counter intuitive to us because we are alive and we are able to do things and we are in relationship with other people.

But if we confess we were in fact actually dead... it shows that in our discipleship progress thus far we have learned that we are mortal, we have learned to see beyond what we can see.

That we can perceive the meaninglessness and emptiness which lies behind all the frenzied activity and business that goes on in our world, and that we have discovered that they have no inherent purpose in and of themselves. It is as Ecclesiastes says “meaningless”

Secondly, we confirm that our state of death is in fact caused by our transgressions and sins. So we have become convicted that there are things that we do that are contrary to God’s laws and how our Creator would have us use his creation.

Some of these transgressions and sins obviously bring about consequences which embody that state of death – broken

relationships, bad health, diseases etc... and some of them actually lead to death.

And in confessing whatever specific transgressions we have committed we are also admitting that they are not just isolated instances of a lapse of better judgment, but rather they are manifestations of how our entire human nature is warped by Sin and under its influence, and as a result the purpose of our lives is actually to serve “*the ruler of the Kingdom of the Air*” which is the devil.

Now that’s a hard truth to acknowledge when you’ve been a fine upstanding Canadian citizen – but in confessing this, it shows that your discipleship progress has allowed you to become aware of the Spiritual reality that exists.

That’s why Paul says this is how “*you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*”

You know how this spiritual reality of Sin and the kingdom of the devil really affects us, and you understand how even living a fine upstanding life apart from acknowledging and thanking and worshipping God, or perhaps acknowledging and thanking and worshipping a false god – is actually disobedient to God and serves the devil’s purposes as much as if you were card-carrying Satanist.

Third, when you confess this about yourself as a human being, as someone who was in a state of being “unsaved,” you are confessing it about humanity and human nature in general.

That’s why Paul says in vs. 3 *“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”*

There’s none of this *“well it may be true for me, but maybe it’s not true for someone else...”* it is true for all of us – we share this in common with everyone.

Which brings us to point number four – that in confessing and confirming our faith we are stating that there is information revealed to us that we cannot find anywhere else except in the scriptures...

Such as sin being the root cause of death and suffering in the world and thus we as humans, all humans, are affected by it and as Paul says *“were by this nature deserving of wrath.”*

Only the scriptures give us the true story of the whole world which Paul is summarizing here in Ephesians 2:1-10, and in making a Confession of Faith we are implicitly stating that we accept, and we believe and we trust what the scriptures reveal to us in all of these matters - as the truth.

And we have to be honest here – the first part of confession is pretty brutal... death, sin and transgression, humanity’s unfaithfulness to God making us deserving of His wrath, it’s enough to keep us from wanting to honest about ourselves in this manner...

However, this is where the good news and the love of God comes in – and the story of scripture reveals God’s plan to do something about our sin and about death and deliver us from it.

So Paul proclaims to us in vs. 4-5 *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”*

So point number five, we proclaim that the shift from being unsaved to being saved takes place in Jesus Christ – and only Jesus Christ.

This is where we go from death to life... from being affected by sin and death to being forgiven and promised resurrection.

God makes us alive in Jesus Christ, you can put your faith and trust in that – shifting away from trusting in our own efforts and abilities or any other possibility or person whereby we might overcome sin and death... it is only Jesus.

And when we confess and confirm that we trust now in Jesus – we shift from being part of “the ways of the world, and being under the power of the ruler of the air and controlled by the spirit of disobedience” to - as Paul says in vs. 6 - being *“raised us up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realms”*

There is a shift in our citizenship as it were – we are now in the heavenly realms in Jesus Christ, we are in the kingdom of Heaven – so yes being saved means that we get to go to heaven, but you can start to see here in this summary how it’s so much more than that - right?

And in confessing and confirming that salvation occurs only in Jesus Christ – and through no one else and by no other means – we must, as Paul does, emphasize that this is an act of grace – that is point number six.

Because if salvation resulted from some other human effort of believing in a good system of religious observances, or we were able to overcome death through science, or we can

avoid God's wrath because we've tried hard enough and had good intentions... then we've done something that contributes to salvation - and we would have a right to boast about it.

"We were saved because we.... did this or that." But Paul goes out of his way to counter that, in vs. 8-9 he says *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."*

When we confirm and confess our faith we must emphasize that the shift to being saved in Christ happens by grace - and not through or as a result of something we did.

So we are saved by grace and not by works, but we will notice in the final verse of this passage that the shift from unsaved to saved also results in a shift from works – to good works.

Saved by grace does not mean being saved from the responsibility to do good works as some seem to think.

Paul says in vs.10 *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

So the final point, of our confession and confirmation of faith needs to show that we understand that we are not saved from this world – but we are saved for this world.

This verse does a reset on the Genesis story – we are the new creation, the new humanity recreated by the Word of God made flesh, and Paul says we have "good" works to do – prepared in advance for us...

So once we are saved – this means that we are brought back to our original purpose as human beings when God created humanity in His image, and put us in the garden to till it and to keep it in partnership with Him.

So living as a Confessing Christian is not about being a nice people who is nice to other nice people.

When we have shifted from being unsaved to being saved we go from pillaging God's creation in rebellion against Him - to developing and stewarding God's creation in obedience to Him to release His blessings and benefits to others in service.

We work to bring previews of God's Kingdom into this world until our Lord returns to bring His Kingdom in in full.

And so this is what we must confess and confirm about our faith brothers and sisters...

And this is what we must be intentional about helping those who are being discipled move towards being able to articulate and say that they believe and trust in it...

This is what we hold each other accountable to as we now live our lives so that we can resist the temptation to ignore and let go of what we have confessed and confirmed and go back to acting as if we were unsaved – when we are not.

This is what needs to be publically spoken – confessed and confirmed in order for someone to correctly answer the question *“Are you saved?”*

So brothers and sisters, are we working the discipleship process so that more and more people who are connecting to us and to Christ are able to say *“Yes... yes I am saved – through faith by grace alone in Jesus Christ”*

Amen.