

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study “*Unlocking the language of our faith*,” this sermon explains a term often used in church but that can be confusing to people unfamiliar with Christianity—Salvation. God has saved us. What does that mean, and how do we explain it to others?

Introduction: Though the word “salvation” is not often used in casual conversation, “save,” one of its derivatives, is. You “save” documents on your computer before closing your word processing program. A large, enjoyable meal will result in portions being set aside for a later meal. You “saved” the leftovers. A DVR allows you to “save” your favorite TV episodes. To “save” something then is to protect it from harm or loss so that you can later use it or enjoy it.

God saves people. He does not use software, airtight containers, or electronics to do it. Neither does He use the Law. The Law is powerless to save. God gave the Law for a different purpose—to show humans their need for salvation.

1. The law defines sin. “*the knowledge of sin*” (v. 20)

Every time you travel down the interstate, you see a sign. It puts a limit on how quickly you can get to your destination. There is no ambiguity about it. Its purpose is to keep you safe, not to steal your fun. Without the law it represents, officers would have no right to stop you regardless of how reckless your speed might be. The speed limit sign defines the most often repeated offense in the government’s expectations on your driving.

God’s law does the same for the Christian. Paul says, “I had not known lust, except the law had said, ‘Thou shalt not covet.’” (Rom. 7:7) It’s not that something is a sin because the Law says not to do it. The Law simply indicates what actions are an offense to a righteous God.

2. The law declares all men to be sinners. “*all have sinned*” (v. 21-23)

I hate them—those flashing signs that tell you how fast you are going. It is easy to convince myself that I am not a lawbreaker until one of those signs blinks a warning at me. “*Slow down. You are going too fast.*” The message makes me feel so guilty. It is effective though. It slows my progress.

Some areas have variable speed limit signs. They are electronic. The numbers change based on traffic or weather conditions. I have seen such signs indicate

one speed on the left side of the interstate and a different speed on the right side. Different speeds for different needs. The contradiction left drivers wondering if not every car faced the same requirement or if they could simply choose which sign to obey.

God's law is not like these. One set of standards applies equally to all men. As we investigate God's Word and see His law there, we receive one message. We are guilty. All of us are guilty.

3. The law is deficient to save. *"justified freely by His grace" (v. 24-26)*

Perhaps you are one of those people who customarily obeys the speed limit. Still, you have either accidentally or purposefully stepped over the line. You are not innocent. Most times, you have escaped your deserved penalty. It is likely, though, that you have seen those dreaded blue lights in your mirror.

The officer put your information into the computer. He read your record. One ticket in the last ten years. Pretty good. At that point, he has a choice to make. Does he follow the law, or does he extend grace? He cannot do both.

Jesus, however, has that power. He can be just and the justifier simultaneously. How? Because He paid your penalty. The Law can only condemn. Jesus alone can save.

4. The law denies men the right to pride in their salvation. *"boasting...is excluded" (v. 27-28)*

You put your ID and insurance card back in your wallet after profusely thanking the officer. Once your heart rate went back to normal, you safely pulled into the flow of traffic. You are a lawbreaker. You are guilty. You deserved punishment. The only reason your bank account did not decrease and your insurance rate will not increase is because the representative of the law was gracious. Your excellent driving record might have influenced him, but you can take no credit for what happened that day.

Neither can you take credit for your salvation. The Bible calls your goodness "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). There are only two appropriate responses. One is humble, continuous thankfulness. The other is a new willingness to submit to the law you once spurned. Though powerless to save, it can protect you and help you to please the One who gave Himself for you.

Conclusion: It is Jesus. It has always been Jesus. He is the Answer to man's need for salvation. What we humans were powerless to do (keep the Law), Jesus did perfectly (Matt. 5:17-18). He paid our penalty. He gave us grace. Why? Because He wants to use us now and enjoy us for all eternity.

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