STARTING OUT AS A CHRISTIAN · STUDY NOTES

# Study 2: God's election of grace

For personal study or groups

Your name

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**How to use these notes.** Watch each part's video on biblehelp.net, or read the text below. Look up each passage in your own Bible and write the answer on the lines. The verses are printed at the back if you need them. At the end there are questions to think about on your own or to discuss in a group.

PART 1

# God's work in us

## Salvation from God's side

As we come to our second study, we may be thinking that God is simply waiting in heaven for people to repent and believe the gospel. Someone might say, "God has done His part by sending Jesus to die for us; now we must do our part." But salvation is not partly our achievement and partly Christ's. If it were, we would be joint saviours, with Christ, of our own souls. No. God, who sent His Son, is also at work drawing us to Himself. It is God who gives us repentance, and faith to believe the gospel. Salvation is God's work from beginning to end, so that He receives all the honour.

In our first study we said that everyone faces a choice: we can either carry on rebelling or turn to God. If you turned to God, it was because God enabled you to. If you are a Christian today, it is because God decided you should become one. In the deepest sense it was God's choice, not yours. So this study looks at salvation from God's side.

## 1. God's Spirit gave us a new nature

If you are a Christian, it is because God has been at work in your life. God's Spirit has made an inner change: you have been "born again".

1 **Look up John 3:5**

**What must happen before anyone can enter the kingdom of God?**

This new birth affects every part of us. It gives us a new desire to serve and please God. Unless God had made this change in your rebellious heart, you would never have submitted to Christ's rule. Without it you would still be spiritually dead.

**2** **Look up Ephesians 2:1**

**What does Paul say we once were?**

When the Bible says we were spiritually dead, it describes a condition that could not be worse. No one can be "deader" than dead! That was your condition before the Lord gave you spiritual life through the new birth.

**3** **Look up Jeremiah 17:9**

**How does this verse describe the human heart?**

## 2. God's decision, not ours

A Christian not only has a new nature through the new birth; he also has a very special honour. The person who is born of God's Spirit is born into God's family. Everyone who receives Christ as Saviour has become a child of God, and that is a great privilege! Now, we did not decide to be born into this world; others, humanly speaking, made that decision for us. In the same way, however it may look, we did not decide to be born into God's family. It was God's choice.

**4** **Look up John 1:12–13**

**Who are God's children born of: people, or God?**

God decided that you should be a Christian before the world began.

**5** **Read Ephesians 1:4–5**

**When did God choose His people?**

It was not you who chose Christ, but Christ who chose you.

**6** **Look up John 15:16**

**Did the disciples choose Jesus, or did He choose them?**

The only reason you love Him now is that He first loved you.

**7** **Look up 1 John 4:19**

**Why do we love God?**

So we conclude that all who repent and believe were appointed by God to eternal life.

**8** **Look up Acts 13:48**

**Who believed?**

PART 2

# Saved by grace

## 3. We are powerless to save ourselves

Those who are dead are powerless to help themselves. Only the power of God could have raised you from spiritual death and changed the direction of your life. Only His Spirit could have given you the desire to be saved. Only Christ could have made you willing to turn from sin. Only He could have released your enslaved will and set it free.

**9** **Read John 8:34–36**

**What does Jesus say about sin, and about being set free?**

The Bible has many examples of people who were once slaves to sin but whom God set free. They could never have saved themselves. God could justly have passed them by, but instead He gave them true repentance and faith.

**Zacchaeus**, for example, had been a very bad man indeed. He was a tax collector working for the hated Roman occupiers. Like all tax collectors of his day, he was a cheat who took more from people than he should. In fact he was a *chief* tax collector, so everyone thought him one of the worst sinners. Jesus saw him watching from a tree as He passed by. Instead of passing him by, Jesus stopped to speak to him and went to his home.

*See also: the remarkable change Jesus brought to Zacchaeus' life: Luke 19:1–10.*

**Saul**, who was later called Paul, threatened Christians with death and dragged them off to prison. He deserved God's judgement more than most, but Jesus stepped into his life too. Saul was not seeking Jesus; Jesus was seeking him. He called himself the worst of sinners.

*See also: Saul's conversion: Acts 9:1–9.*

**10** **Look up 1 Timothy 1:15**

**Why did Christ Jesus come into the world, and what did Paul call himself?**

Zacchaeus and Saul were reckless sinners, set in their evil ways. If God had not chosen them, they would never have chosen God! You were just as undeserving and just as powerless. Sin was too strong for you, and you were spiritually helpless. It is only because God broke into your life that you are saved today. This undeserved love of God towards you is called **grace**!

**Grace**
Grace is God's undeserved love. He chose to save people who could never save themselves, and who did not deserve to be saved.

## 4. Finally

When you became a Christian you did not simply turn over a new leaf. Nor did you decide to "follow Jesus" the way some people choose to follow a religious teacher. When you were converted you became a new creation – something far beyond the reach of your own enslaved will.

11 **Look up 2 Corinthians 5:17**

**What is anyone who is in Christ?**

Before the world began, you were the object of God's choice. Then, 2,000 years ago, His Son died to pay the price of your sin. More recently, God has worked in you to draw you to Himself. And God, who has done so much in you and for you, will also keep you by His power for ever.

THINK IT THROUGH

## Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Why does it matter that salvation is God's work from beginning to end?

2. Zacchaeus and Saul were not looking for Jesus, but He was looking for them. What does that tell you about God?

3. How should knowing that God chose you affect the way you live and pray?

HIDE IT IN YOUR HEART

# Memory verse for study 2

Learn this verse by heart this week. Cut out the card and keep it where you will see it.

STARTING OUT AS A CHRISTIAN · STUDY 2 · MEMORY VERSE

*“We love because He first loved us.”*

**1 John 4:19**

Berean Standard Bible · biblehelp.net

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11, BSB)

AT THE BACK

# The Bible passages (BSB)

1 **John 3:5** *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.*

2 **Ephesians 2:1** *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,*

3 **Jeremiah 17:9** *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

4 **John 1:12–13** *12But to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God— 13children born not of blood, nor of the desire or will of man, but born of God.*

5 **Ephesians 1:4–5** *4For He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His presence. In love 5He predestined us for adoption as His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will,*

6 **John 15:16** *You did not choose Me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will remain—so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you.*

7 **1 John 4:19** *We love because He first loved us.*

8 **Acts 13:48** *When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and glorified the word of the Lord, and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*

9 **John 8:34–36** *34Jesus replied, "Truly, truly, I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35A slave does not remain in the house forever, but a son remains forever. 36So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

10 **1 Timothy 1:15** *This is a trustworthy saying, worthy of full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.*

11 **2 Corinthians 5:17** *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come!*

Scripture: Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain. Quotations keep its American spelling. Like many English Bibles, it often says 'man', 'he' or 'brothers' where it means people in general, men and women alike.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

# Study 2: God's election of grace

> **Memory verse:** “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19). Say it together at the end, and ask who can say it without looking.

## Aims

- Show that salvation is God's work from beginning to end: the new birth, God's choice, His power to set us free.
- Help new believers see that they were chosen before the world began, and are kept by God's power.
- Lead the group to wonder at God's grace, His undeserved love.

## Suggested timing (about 60 minutes)

- **5 min** Welcome and short prayer.
- **25 min** Part 1 video (5 min); John 3:5, Ephesians 2:1, Jeremiah 17:9, John 1:12–13, Ephesians 1:4, John 15:16, 1 John 4:19 and Acts 13:48.
- **25 min** Part 2 video (4 min); John 8:34–36, 1 Timothy 1:15, 2 Corinthians 5:17 and the discussion questions.
- **5 min** Summary and closing prayer.

## Tips

- This study can raise questions ("Then what about our choice?"). The authors hold both truths: God chooses and saves, and everyone is responsible to repent and believe (study 1). Election is a comfort to believers, not a reason to hold back from the gospel.
- Keep the focus on God's grace: He chose to save people who could never save themselves.
- Zacchaeus and Saul show that no one is too bad to be saved.

## Answers to watch for

- **John 3:5:** no one can enter the kingdom of God unless born of water and the Spirit.
- **Ephesians 2:1:** we were dead in our trespasses and sins.
- **Jeremiah 17:9:** the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.
- **John 1:12–13:** children of God are born not of the will of man, but of God.
- **Ephesians 1:4:** God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.
- **John 15:16:** "You did not choose Me, but I chose you."
- **1 John 4:19:** we love because He first loved us.
- **Acts 13:48:** all who were appointed for eternal life believed.
- **John 8:34–36:** everyone who sins is a slave to sin; if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
- **1 Timothy 1:15:** Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom Paul was the worst.
- **2 Corinthians 5:17:** if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.