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Paul's Doctrine of Salvation

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IN PAUL'S theology salvation is of the Lord. It was something purposed and planned back in eternity, and not an afterthought to meet an unexpected emergency. Back there when there was nothing but God dwelling in the immensity of His own eternal essence, the creation of man and his fall into sin and death were anticipated, and the redemption of a new race, of which the eternal Son was to be the head, was planned. And the Divine motive in salvation was that it might be to the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:6). The ultimate reason for salvation is that God might have an eternal display of the riches of His grace. "That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 2:7). God's glory rather than man's good is the real reason for salvation. It is all in order, "That we should be to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:12).

All the blessings of salvation come from God as the meritorious ground and efficient cause. The believer spontaneously thanks God for all spiritual blessings. Spurgeon says that for every saved person God is to be thanked. Saved men are grace-made and not self-made. Paul says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

All the blessings of salvation are ours because God purposed that they should be ours. And this purpose was formed back in eternity. God is working in history what He purposed and planned in eternity past. God is not forming new purposes and making new plans to meet the needs of the hour, but is working all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11).

God's purpose to save was a purpose of grace. Salvation does not proceed from Divine Justice, but from Divine grace, which is undeserved love. Grace

is the source and fountain from which all spiritual blessings come, and Christ is the channel through which they come to us. And so Paul breaks out in blessed doxology; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus

Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:3-6). Election is the choice of persons, and predestination determines their destiny as adopted sons to be conformed to the image of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). Let us remember that election and predestination are unto salvation and not unto damnation. These blessed doctrines harm nobody, but are the means of blessing to many. We recognize the Bible doctrine of reprobation, but do not associate it with election and predestination. We rather think of preterition, or the passing by, of those not elected. It is an obvious fact that in the history of mankind multitudes have been passed by in the providential dispensing of the blessings of grace. Whatever we may think about the Bible doctrine of reprobation, we may be sure that it is not an efficient act of God as predestination is. Predestination issues in glory, while reprobation leaves the sinner in his fallen and depraved state.

Several years ago the doctrine of election was being discussed in The West Kentucky Baptist Pastors' Conference at Henderson. Various views were being given and some of the brethren advised caution, insisting that it should not be preached in the

presence of the lost. After free and brotherly discussion, Bro. A. R. McGehee, Earlington Pastor, now in glory, arose and said, "Brethren, I think it will be all right for it to get out anywhere." Spurgeon preached election, and sinners were aroused and saved under such preaching. Paul recognized the Thessalonians as the elect of God by the way they received the gospel. "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:4, 5). The elect of God are manifested in faith and good works.

Dr. Conner rings clear on election and predestination. He says, "God's purpose to save a particular man is a matter of grace." Let us take a whole paragraph from his book.

"The ground of salvation is thus in God, not man. There is nothing in man that constitutes the ground of salvation. It is all due to the unmerited grace of God. No man can say when he is saved that his salvation was due to something in him that made him better than other men. Such a claim would not be justified. Not even man's faith is the ground of his election. Grace is the basis of faith, not faith the basis of grace. Faith apprehends grace, responds to grace, rather than being the ground of grace. Grace works faith in man. Faith on man's part does not work grace in God. Grace precedes faith and works faith."

In the above Dr. Conner is in harmony with Baptist theologians of the past; such men as Bunyan, Fuller, Boyce, Broadus, Carroll, Mullins, and others too numerous to mention. And one can only hope that our present day theologians are as true to the doctrines of grace. Every teacher in Louisville Baptist Seminary subscribes to the "Abstract of Principles", and Article V reads as follows: "Election is God's eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life — not because of foreseen merit in them, but of His mere mercy in Christ — in consequence of which choice they are called, justified, and glorified."

Some years ago a woman said to a Baptist pastor: "I would apply for membership in your church if you did not preach election." The pastor asked if she was saved, and she answered that she was. He then asked her if God saved her or did she save herself. She replied that God saved her. And then he inquired whether God saved her by accident or because He purposed to save her. She had never looked at it this way, but could only reply that God must have purposed to save her. "And this," said the pastor, "is election". Paul says that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

The natural man never objects to a doctrine of eternal election based upon man's foreseen faith. Paul knew that his doctrine of election would give rise to objections, such as making God unrighteous, and as asking, "Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?" (Rom. 9:19). And so one may be sure that if his view of election does not raise objections, it is not according to Paul's doctrine of election.

THE NATURE OF SALVATION

Salvation is a comprehensive term to include all spiritual and eternal blessings one has in Christ. The word salvation means deliverance, and Bible salvation is deliverance from sin. And since sin consists both of guilt and defilement, salvation must deliver from a position of guilt and a state of defilement. To be saved the sinner must have guilt and penalty removed to give him the right to go to heaven; and he must have the defiled nature removed to fit him for heaven. There are two phases of salvation: safety and soundness. The act of making a man safe is done once for all in justification; the work of making the sinner sound is a process completed in glorification.

There are three tenses of our salvation: past, present, and future. We have been saved from the guilt of sin through faith in Christ; we are being saved from the damning power of present sin because we are not under law as a way of life; and we will yet be saved when we are glorified at the return of Christ. Writing to the Roman saints Paul said, "For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Rom. 13:11). In one sense the believer is already saved, in another sense he is being saved, and in still another sense he will be saved. The work that makes the believer safe was done by Christ when He redeemed us from the curse of the law; the work of making the believer sound is a progressive work beginning in regeneration and ending in glorification. And Paul expresses confidence that God Who begins the good work within us will complete it (Phil. 1:6). Paul is so sure of this that he puts all the phases of salvation in the past tense. Writing from the standpoint of God's eternal purpose he says, "Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). This is not difficult to understand, if we believe God is a mighty and successful Saviour. If salvation were a human project, nothing could be certain, and the future would be dark indeed for all men. The three persons in the Godhead perform distinct but harmonious offices in the work of human salvation. The Father purposed our salvation, the Son purchased our salvation, and the Spirit promotes our salvation.

THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF SALVATION DIFFERENTIATED

Sin has done so much damage to man, and salvation is such a wonderful recovery from sin's ruin, that it takes many terms to express it all. If the sinner be viewed as in a state of death, then regeneration or the new birth is the Bible word to denote the impartation of life. If the sinner is considered as a child of the devil, then adoption is the Bible term to denote the judicial act of God in placing him as a son of God. If we think of the sinner from the standpoint of his body, being mortal and having in it the germs of death which will turn it into a dust-heap, then glorification is that aspect of salvation when his resurrected body will be fashioned like unto the body of the glorified Christ. If the lost person is considered in his state of moral defilement, then sanctification is the word that speaks of his being made holy before God. If

we think of the sinner as in a state of spiritual darkness, to whom the things of God are foolishness, and unable to understand the gospel, then calling is the Bible word to express the act of God in giving light by which the sinner can see or understand that Christ crucified is the wisdom and power of God in the plan of salvation. Paul preached salvation through a crucified Christ; to the natural Jew it was a stumbling block and to the natural Greek it was silly or foolish, but to the called it was the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23, 24). And in 2 Cor. 4:6 Paul says, "For God . . . hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." If salvation be approached from the standpoint of the eternal purpose of grace, then election and predestination are the terms which denote the choice and destiny of God's people. And if the lost person be viewed as in a state of condemnation — cursed by the law — then justification is that aspect of salvation by which the believer is declared righteous, having a perfect standing before God in Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). We shall now amplify upon some of these aspects of salvation.

1. *Justification* is the Divine acquittal of one charged with and found guilty of sin. It is not an efficient act of God by which the sinner is made better, but a declarative act by which the believer is declared to be perfect. Justification is on the ground of the blood of Christ. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). God declares the believer to be righteous with the righteousness Christ provided by His obedience unto the death of the cross. The Jews for whom Paul prayed so earnestly were ignorant of this, and instead of trusting Christ for righteousness were going about to establish their own righteousness by keeping the law (Rom. 10:1-4).

2. *Reconciliation* is the basis or ground of justification. Reconciliation is therefore the removal of God's wrath toward the sinner. It is the efficient act of God by which He removes the cause of condemnation. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). At Calvary God was not charging sin to men, but providing reconciliation by charging sin to Christ. Reconciliation is Godward, being the removal of His wrath; justification is manward, being the removal of condemnation. Reconciliation is to be accepted as God's gift through Christ (Rom. 5:11) — here the word translated "atonement" should be "reconciliation".

3. *Adoption* means the placing as a son. It is the legal procedure of bringing into the family one who was not born into the family. Adoption is closely related to regeneration, but expresses an idea not expressed in regeneration. The new birth gives one the nature of God, but not the legal right to be in the family. Adoption is also closely related to justification, but expresses something more than justification. Justification does away with guilt and condemnation, but it does not make the person the son of the judge.

There are five references to adoption in the New

Testament with a threefold application. In Rom. 9:4 the application is to national Israel. The nation had been brought into the peculiar relation to God as a son. In Rom. 8:23 adoption is used with respect to the believer's body, and is called the redemption of the body. When the bodies of believers are redeemed from the grave they will then be adopted — publicly manifested as sons of God (Rom. 8:19). In the other three references the application seems to be to the believer as a person without distinction between soul and body. As persons, believers are the adopted sons of God, and have the spirit of adoption by which they cry, "Abba, Father".

4. *Sanctification*, so far as the word itself is concerned, has no moral or ethical connotation. As a verb the word means to consecrate or set apart. In Ex. 13:1 Moses is told to sanctify unto the Lord all the first born, and in repeating the commandment he is told to set apart all the first born. The word is used of things which have no moral or ethical qualities, such as vessels, buildings, and a mountain. Of course when used of persons, the word takes on ethical meaning. But the basic idea expressed by the word sanctify is that of being separated from and set apart to sacred use.

This blessed doctrine has been terribly perverted. The Roman Catholic Church makes saints of people after they die, but Paul wrote to living people and addressed them as saints. Others miss the truth by identifying sainthood with sinlessness. Paul addresses the Corinthians as saints and then rebukes them for their carnality. Our New Hampshire Confession has an adequate definition of sanctification in that it makes it progressive as a growth in grace. And Dr. Conner speaks to the point when he says that Protestant theology was not following Paul when it made the idea of Christian development the main idea in sanctification.

In Paul's writings every saved person is a saint. In their conversion by the power of the Spirit they were separated from the world and set apart as belonging to God. And being sanctified or set apart in Christ, they have His holiness imputed to them. In 1 Cor. 1:30, Paul says that Christ is made unto us wisdom from God, even righteousness and sanctification and redemption. This is imputed sanctification or holiness. And this is absolute and forever, for Christ is our holiness. Now sanctification by the word is progressive. Christ prayed that His people might be sanctified by the truth (Jno. 17:17). As the believer feeds on the word of God he will be more and more separated from the world and set apart to the service of God. It has been truly said that sin will keep us from the word, or the word will keep us from sin. Feeding on the word will have a sanctifying influence in our lives.

Finally, as conclusive proof that sanctification is not the eradication of the sinful nature, we may point out that Christ was sanctified by the Father, and that He sanctified himself (Jno. 10:36; Jno. 17:19). But Christ had no sin to be eradicated, for He was holy, and undefiled, and separate from sinners in His essential nature. Moreover, we are told in Jer. 1:5 that Jeremiah was sanctified before he was born — before he had any actual existence. Christ was set apart to be the one and only Saviour of sinners, and Jeremiah, in the purpose of God, was set apart to the office of prophet before birth.