



What We Believe

Article 5 of 13: The Plan of God

The Plan of God: We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that He will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those He has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

The Plan of God

The Plan of God in Scripture encompasses everything from eternity past into all eternity future. From every detail of creation to every detail in the unfolding of the history of the universe on through everything that will ever come to pass in the future. This is yet another awesome subject that we could write volumes about, however, the scope of our current study is the plan of God as it relates specifically to salvation, the plan of God in redemption. Even with this narrower scope, we could write a book.

The Sovereignty of God

Foundational to the plan of God, is the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God. As we noted in our first article, Our Tri-une God Part 1, the sovereignty of God is one of His glorious attributes. God is the Sovereign of the universe and He exercises His sovereignty in accordance with His eternal will. Many hold to the concept of the sovereignty of God in a general sense, but struggle with the extent of His sovereignty when it comes into relation with the human will and with redemption and with the reality of evil. We must remember when considering such an awesome truth, that Scripture is our rule and authority and that God exercises His sovereignty in accordance with all His attributes. Just as God is righteous, He exercises His sovereignty in line with His righteousness.



A.W. Pink wrote the modern classic on the subject of God's Sovereignty:

"What do we mean by the sovereignty of God? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God...Such is the God of the Bible. How different is the God of the Bible from the God of modern Christendom! The God of many a present-day pulpit is an object of pity rather than of awe-inspiring reverence. In a word, to deny the Sovereignty of God is to enter upon a path which, if followed to its logical terminus, is to arrive at blank atheism. The Sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite."

A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, Chapter 1

R.C. Sproul adds the following important thoughts in our age of quantum physics as he wrote:

"Is God in control of every single molecule in the universe? Don't you realize that if there is one molecule in this universe running around loose outside the scope or the sphere of God's divine control and authority and power, then that single maverick molecule may be the grain of sand that changes the entire course of human history, that blocks God from keeping the promises he has made to his people? It may be that one maverick molecule that will prevent Christ from the consummation of his kingdom. ... If there is any element of the universe that is outside of his authority, then he no longer is God over all. In other words, sovereignty belongs to deity."

R.C. Sproul, *The Sovereignty of God*

The importance of our owning the full, Scriptural doctrine of the sovereignty of God cannot be overstated.

"everything in heaven and earth is yours."

1 Chronicles 29:11

"Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever."

Psalms 45:6

"He rules forever by His power, His eyes watch the nations..."

Psalms 66:7

"Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him."

Psalms 115:3

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please."

Isaiah 46:10

"It is written: As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God."

Romans 14:11

The truth of the full sovereignty of God touches upon everything. God rules over all things, from the smallest of sub-atomic particles to the entire creation, even in salvation!

Grace

As we begin to focus our attention on God's work in redemption, we must see from the very start the essential importance of the role of the grace of God in salvation. The grace of God is fundamental in the continued existence of humanity and it is indeed fundamental in the salvation of humanity. The most basic definition of grace is, "unmerited or undeserved favor".

Grudem explains, "God's grace means God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment."

Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 200

The word grace has been also expressed in an acrostic: **G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense

Historically the grace of God has been seen in two senses, common grace and saving grace. Just as the plan of God as noted above is general in one sense and special as it pertains to salvation, so also grace in a general sense has been extended to all humanity even in its fallen state. Some examples of common grace would be God's preservation of the universe, Hebrews 1:2-3, His general provision, Psalm 145:15, 16. He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust, Matt. 5:45. The restraint of evil, Gen. 20:6; Ps 19:13; Ps. 33:10.

Saving grace has been extended by God in a particular sense to those upon whom God set His eternal redeeming love. This is exemplified by His being proactive in providing the way of reconciliation for rebellious sinners in Christ, and the actual exercise of His grace in granting repentance and faith to sinners who are dead in sin. "It is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved." Acts 15: 11. "... there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works." Romans 11:5. "In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope..." 1 Peter 1:3

It is in this sense, of God's special saving grace, that we many times refer to as "Sovereign Grace."

God's Eternal Decree

Stemming from God's sovereignty, flows God's eternal decree, in which He foreordained, predestined, elected, chose, and predetermined everything that would come to pass in the future realized in His wondrous works of providence. Psalm 2:7; Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:11, 3:11.

Grudem comments on the decree of God:

"The decrees of God are the eternal plans of God whereby, before the creation of the world, he determined to bring about everything that happens. This doctrine is similar to the doctrine of providence, but here we are thinking about God's decisions before the world was created, rather than his providential action in time."
Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p 332, 333

In Eph. 1:11, Paul explained that, before the foundation of the world, the three persons of the Trinity set an all-encompassing plan for history. Paul used four key words— predestined, purpose, counsel, and will ... This eternal decree ... embraces "all things," or whatsoever comes to pass. Included in this plan is the salvation of the elect, as well as all the necessary means to that end, including the preaching of the gospel, prayer, holy living, and the human responsibility to believe.

Adapted from Steven Lawson, *Foundations of Grace*, p 417, 418

God's infallible knowledge of all things, past present and future is related to His eternal decree. He knows all things, is omniscient, and foresees all things because He has "declared the end from the beginning... My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" Is. 46:9, 10.

Providence

Related to the doctrine of divine sovereignty and God's decree is the doctrine of divine providence. Whereas, God's decree is from eternity past, providence is the unfolding of that decree carried out by God in time and space history. Grudem writes:

"Though the term providence is not found in Scripture, it has been traditionally used to summarize God's ongoing relationship to his creation. God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing ... (2) cooperates with created things in every action... and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes."
Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 315

Job 12:10 says that the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind is in God's hand.

Foreordination and Predestination

The terms foreordination and predestination are very closely related in Scripture. These two words seem to be used in relation to individuals, things and events.

Of Individuals – Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5, 6; Of Things – 1 Cor. 2:7; Of Events – Acts 4:28

Concerning the importance of the doctrine, R.C. Sproul says,

“there is one word, that when it is spoken, it strikes terror in the souls of the faint hearted and that word is the word, predestination.” “As difficult as it may be, I think it is even more important that we study it.” R.C. Sproul, All Christians Believe this Doctrine, Audio Resource, Ligonier Ministries

The Greek word *proorizō* means to predetermine, decide beforehand, in the NT it speaks of God decreeing from eternity to foreordain, appoint beforehand. It appears 6 times in the NT and is translated all 6x “predestined” in the NASB and is translated predestinate 4x, determine before 1x, ordain 1x in the KJV. This word is related to another word, *horizō* meaning to mark out the boundaries or limits, appoint, determine, decree to ordain. This word is used in Acts 2:23 to describe God’s foreordained plan for the crucifixion of Christ.

“The doctrine of predestination has both a wider and a narrower aspect. In its wider reference it refers to the fact that the Triune God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass (Eph. 1:11, 22; Ps. 2).

The narrower aspect or use of the term is that God from all eternity has chosen a body of people for himself, that they should be brought into eternal fellowship with him, while at the same time he has ordained that the rest of humanity should be allowed to go its own way, which is the way of sin, to ultimate eternal punishment.” W.S. Reid, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Elwell p. 972

The Plan - God’s Eternal Purpose in Salvation

We noted above that the plan of God in Scripture encompasses everything from eternity past into all eternity future. We will now focus more narrowly on the plan of God as it relates to salvation, and in this particular article our emphasis will be on the decreeing of Christ’s role as the Savior, the events and the individuals in the plan of God.

Foreknowledge and Election

Just as the words foreordination and predestination seem to resonate together, so also do foreknowledge and election. Our statement of faith reads,

“We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them.”

God’s foreknowing and electing or choosing of individuals are related as expressions of His redemptive love. That God loves the world as such is an expression of His most kind benevolence towards humanity in general, but that God foreknows and chooses individuals unto salvation exemplifies His sovereign, special saving love towards His people. Let’s look at the concept of foreknowledge first.

Foreknowledge

Underlying the concept of foreknowledge in the Bible are the original words for knowing. In Hebrew there is the word *yadah*. It can have a general connotation, but used in relation to people it carries an emphasis of personal knowledge rather than just knowing facts about people. Some Scriptural examples of this are of Abraham, God says, “For I have chosen Him. Gen. 18:19, (the word is translated chosen here, interesting!). Of Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” Jeremiah 1:5.

Steven Lawson in his monumental work “Foundations of Grace” argues that *yadah* means, “to know, or to know with loving care, or elective love. Lawson p.61, 62

The article on foreknowledge in the Zondervan Encyclopedia says,

“Know means to know with distinguishing regard, affection, and purpose and come to be synonymous with love ... The inference is inescapable that to know is the same as to love ... Hence, to know beforehand is to know with peculiar regard and love from before the foundation of the world.” Foreknow, Zondervan Pictorial Encyc. Vol 2, p. 591

Yadah is also used in Jeremiah 31:31 when the LORD revealed the coming of the New Covenant, promising that each one of His people would know Him personally!

The corresponding Greek word is *ginosko* and means to know, perceive, feel, to become known, or to become acquainted with compared to *gnosis*, which speaks more of a general knowledge or intelligence. In John 17:3, Jesus said that eternal life was to know the Father and to know Himself. This N.T. passage corresponds to the Jer. 31 passage on knowing God. So, the Greek *ginosko* follows along the same line of emphasis as the Hebrew *yadah* expressing the personal relational knowing of individuals.

Prognosis and Proginosko

One Greek word used for foreknowledge is *prognosis* and can mean foreknowledge, forethought or pre-arrangement. Here we have the idea of knowledge of facts or events beforehand, to foresee, or of details being pre-arranged. The thought here is not God discovering and reacting to future human choices ahead of time, but God knowing future human actions because He sovereignly decreed all things from eternity past. It is not a chess game for God, it is declaring the end from the beginning. See Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:2

The other Greek word used for foreknowledge is *proginosko*, which speaks of God knowing people relationally beforehand. For God to foreknow someone in this sense is the same as God choosing or predestinating him and is an expression of special saving love. Scriptural examples of this are:

“whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.” Rom. 8:29

“God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew...” Rom. 11:2

“He was foreknown before the foundation of the world.” 1 Peter 1:20

The main point we are making here is that it is foreknowledge of persons, not facts. Romans 8:29 tells us, “Those He foreknew”, not those He knew facts about beforehand! Grudem puts it this way,

“We could say that it means, “those whom He long ago thought of in a saving relationship with himself.” “This verse says nothing of God foreknowing or foreseeing that certain people would believe, nor is that idea mentioned in any other text of Scripture.” Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 676.

R.C. Sproul clarifies what is meant when the Bible uses the term “foreknew”:

“From all eternity God foreknew His elect. He had an idea of their identities in his mind before he ever created them. He not only foreknew them in the sense of having a prior idea of their personal identities, but he also foreknew them in the sense of foreloving them. We must remember that when the Bible speaks of “knowing” it often distinguishes between a simple mental awareness of a person and a deep intimate love of the person.” R.C. Sproul, Chosen by God, p. 137

Foreseen faith is never given as a reason for God’s electing choice in Scripture. All of this stems from philosophical speculations. Colossians 2:8 warns us about being taken by philosophical speculations.

Election unto Salvation

As we follow through the progression from sovereignty, to decree, to foreordination and predestination, to election, we could say that in a sense, election is a part of predestination. As we focus on God’s choice of individuals, His sovereign election of them unto salvation, it is important for us to realize that it is election unto salvation through the Gospel and not apart from the Gospel, from repentance, faith and sanctification. Election is unto salvation and its various facets, not directly to heaven apart from holiness. Louis Berkhof defines election this way:

“the act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation. More briefly it may be said to be God’s eternal purpose to save some of the human race in and by Jesus Christ.”

Berkhof, Systematic Theology p. 114

Grudem refers election this way:

“it is chronologically the beginning of God’s dealing with us in a gracious way. There, it is rightly thought of as the first step in the process of God’s bringing salvation to us individually.”

Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 670

Concerning election, Martin Luther said:

“Election is the ‘core ecclesia’ or heart of the church.”

R.C. Sproul, All Christians Believe this Doctrine, [Audio Resource, Ligonier Ministries](#)

It is important also to realize that this is not a new teaching or doctrine! It was emphasized and recovered by both the Lutheran and Reformed sides of the Reformation, and it has been important among various Baptist groups since the Reformation. CrossLife is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. It is interesting to note the rich history of this doctrine of sovereign election in the SBC. The founders of the SBC held firmly to this awesome truth. Most Southern Baptists do not realize this. What ultimately matters, however, is that this truth comes from a long line of emphasis beginning in the O.T., and it was a powerful part of the message and teaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

The Hebrew word *bachar*, means to choose, elect, decide for, to be chosen, be selected. The Greek word *eklegomai*, means to pick out, choose, to pick or choose out for one's self, choosing one out of many, of God the Father choosing Christians, as those whom he set apart from the irreligious

multitude as dear unto himself. The Greek *ekloge* is the act of picking out, choosing. The act of God's free will by which before the foundation of the world he decreed his blessings to certain persons. The decree made from choice by which he determined to bless certain persons through Christ by grace alone. The word *eklektos* can be defined as - picked out, chosen, chosen by God to obtain salvation through Christ.

As far as the O.T. is concerned, the election of Abraham and his descendants into a nation foreshadows election unto salvation expounded much more clearly in the N.T. The election of Israel originated in God's sovereign choice, expressed his covenantal love, and served the goal of redemptive history culminating in Jesus Christ. See Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, p. 348

Abraham was chosen by God. Gen. 18:19

God's loving, faithful, affectionate choice of Israel. Deut. 4:37; 7:6-8; 10:14, 15; Isaiah 44:1; 45:4

God had only "known" Israel of all the families of the earth. Amos 3:2

The Apostle Paul commenting on God's choosing of Jacob over Esau, sheds light on the place election played in O.T. redemptive history,

"... though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls. ... So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." Rom. 9:10-16

In the N.T., sovereign election is dealt with as a matter of fact. The following are some of the most powerful passages on this awesome truth:

"And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Acts 13:48

"those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son ... And those whom he predestined he also called " Rom. 8:29, 30

"He chose us in him before the foundation of the world ... he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will ..." Ephesians 1:4, 5

"having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will..." Ephesians 1:11

"But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, ... beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." 2 Thess. 2:13

"you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession ..." 1 Pet. 2:9

"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." 2 Timothy 2:10

Also see Romans 8:33, 11:5; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1, 2; 2 Peter 1:10

What did Jesus say about election?

Jesus referred to his elect, chosen people in various places, often describing them as the people the Father had given Him:

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day." John 6:37-39

"I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit ..." John 15:16

"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." John 15:19

John 17 is rich with Jesus' references concerning election, those given Him by the Father.

"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. John 17:6

"I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours." John 17:9

The Father chose a people and a bride in sovereign unconditional election and gave them to His Son. Sovereign election was part of Jesus' own teaching!

What is God's choice in election based on?

We see clearly now that election has been a part of Biblical revelation since the O.T. The question remains, what is God's decision and choice in election based on? R.C. Sproul says,

"All Christians believe this doctrine. The concept is clearly found in the Scriptures and every church has some view on it. The question is how do they understand it? What do they base their view on?" R.C. Sproul, All Christians Believe this Doctrine, Audio Resource, Ligonier Ministries

There are two main perspectives on what God's choice in election is based upon, the Sovereign or

Unconditional view and the Foreknowledge or Prescience View. The first view, we would contend, is a God-centered approach to the issue in that it is based on God's will and free choice. In his classic book on the topic, "Chosen by God", R.C. Sproul writes in his classic book, "Chosen by God":

"God's choice precedes man's choice!" R.C. Sproul, Chosen by God, p. 137

The second view is a more man-centered approach in that it would ultimately be based on God's reaction to man's actions. We would have to say that the foreknowledge/prescience view is not ultimately a "grace-based" view of election! It is more of a man-centered view of election and is largely influenced by philosophical persuasion and human tradition. Sproul argues:

"the foreknowledge view is not so much an explanation of the biblical doctrine of predestination as it is a denial of the biblical doctrine. It fails to include the whole counsel of God on the matter. ... All the text declares is that God predestines those whom He foreknows" Sproul, Chosen by God, p. 130, 131

"Now we are forced back to a serious question ... Why is it that some are predestined to receive this call of God and others are not? Does the answer lie in man or in the purposes of God? An advocate of the foreknowledge view would have to answer that the reason God calls only some people inwardly is that he knows in advance who will respond positively to the inward call and who will not. Therefore ... he only gives it to those whom he knows will respond favorably to it." Sproul, Chosen by God, p. 135

As we emphasized previously, God foreknows future facts and events (*prognosis*) because they are the outflow of His sovereign decree, not because He foresees man's future actions and ratifies or reacts to them. He knows the end from the beginning because He has ordained it. God foreknows His people intimately (*proginosko*) as He has ordained them unto salvation based on His own divine prerogative and sovereign saving love. Because of its strong Scriptural basis, and the Biblical evidence that it was taught by Jesus and the Apostles, the teaching at CrossLife falls under the sovereign/unconditional election view point. We would humbly assert that the sovereign/ unconditional view of election is the truly grace-based and God-honoring view of election.

When we say that election is unconditional we mean that there is no condition in any person which would cause God to choose him. Again Sproul writes:

"Unconditional election means that our election is decided by God according to his purpose, according to his sovereign will. It is not based upon some foreseen condition that some of us meet and other fail to meet. It is not based on our willing or on our running, but upon the sovereign purpose of God."

R.C. Sproul, Chosen by God, p. 154, 155

Election is based on God's sovereign grace and redeeming love.

"He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" Eph 1:5-6

God's choosing of one individual over another is not based on foreseen faith or any foreseen action on the individual's part. None of us were worthy to be marked out for God's election according grace. He simply chose to bestow His sovereign redeeming love on us for reasons within Himself. This is similar to the basis of His choosing of Israel as a nation.

"it is because the LORD loves you" Deuteronomy 7:6-8

"It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy," Romans 9:16.

This is the Word of God to Christians, how can we hold any other view of predestination that makes the ultimate decision for salvation rest in the will of man? Election doesn't invalidate our choices and faculty of volition. It is not the same as determinism or a universe controlled by and inflexible force. God's electing choice of an individual is not based on anything in the individual, this would make the choice based on some merit or thing in the person and would not be election but rather a ratification. However one may feel about eternal election, we must keep in mind that God is righteous and it is from His pure grace and mercy as our statement of faith so beautifully states, "a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation have been chosen unto salvation."

Is there injustice with God – God Forbid!

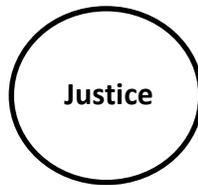
In Romans chapter 9, the Apostle Paul puts to rest any charge that God's eternal sovereign unconditional election of some guilty sinners unto salvation, leaving the rest of sinful humanity to themselves and the consequences of their sin is injustice when he argues:

"What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." Romans 9:14-16

Guilty Sinners Group A
Elect According to Grace
Receive



Guilty Sinners Group B
Non-Elect Passed Over
Receive



No-One
Receives



“You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?” Romans 9:17-24

God is not unjust in having electing mercy and compassion on whom He wills! The Potter has power over the clay to do what He wills with it! Who is rebellious humanity to accuse God?

Praise God for His unconditional electing grace, without which we would not have chosen Him!

Practical Application of the truth of Election

The Biblical doctrine of sovereign unconditional election is revealed to us for our comfort, our encouragement, for our firm grounding in the faith! Grudem writes,

“In terms of our own relationship with God, the doctrine of election does have significant practical application. When we think of the biblical teaching on both election and reprobation, it is appropriate to apply it to our own lives individually. ... The doctrine of election tells us that I am a Christian simply because God in eternity past decided to set his love on me. But why did he decide to set his love on me? Not for anything good in me, but simply because he decided to love me. There is no more ultimate reason than that. It humbles us before God to think in this way. It makes us realize that we have no claim on God’s grace whatsoever. Our salvation is totally due to grace alone. Our only appropriate response is to give God eternal praise.” Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 686, 687

Election is a comfort to us as believers - Romans 8:28

Election gives us reason to praise God - Ephesians 1:5-6, 12

Election humbles us - 2 Peter 1:3-11

Election stirs gratitude in us - 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5

Election gives us a sense of purpose in service and for evangelism - 2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Thess. 2:13.

May God help us to come to a fuller Biblical understanding of this great encouraging truth. That we could really grasp the height and the depth of it, that it would truly humble us. That we would truly cherish it and be transformed by it!

The Golden Chain of Redemption - The Order of Salvation

Our statement of faith goes on to say:

“We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that He will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace.”

As we noted above, election is unto salvation. In reality, salvation is a process conceived of in eternity past by God, accomplished in the redemptive work of Christ, applied to us His people in time and space history, to be consummated at the Second Coming in the resurrection. How we view the unfolding of the various parts or aspects of salvation is what we call the Order of Salvation, or Ordo Solutis in Latin.

In Romans chapter 8:29, 30 we have a basic representation of this order of salvation:

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

In terms of Sovereign Grace, the order of salvation would basically be seen as: Predestination/ election based on God’s redeeming love > regeneration (being born again) > faith & repentance in response to the Gospel resulting in conversion > justification > sanctification/perseverance > glorification. This basic order differs from other views in that they see election based on foreseen

faith > faith and repentance as acts of human free will with help from God resulting in regeneration > justification > sanctification > perseverance > glorification. These stages show the basic differences between the two basic approaches. These are not necessarily fully chronological steps, but may be seen as logical distinctions in the experiential application of salvation.

Justification by Grace through Faith in Christ Alone

God is just and the justifier of the ungodly! We will look at this great doctrine in much more detail when we cover article eight of our statement of faith, but in summary, this is one of those essential truths upon which the church depends and upon which the Gospel stands or falls! Essentially, the Biblical doctrine of Justification may be stated as follows: God declares guilty sinners as righteous in standing before Him by grace through faith alone in the “good news” of the perfect atoning sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone. Justification is about being accounted “right” with God. By grace through faith our sins are forgiven, our guilt fully transferred to Christ and His perfect righteousness reckoned to our eternal account. This is why this wonderful doctrine has been called the “Great Exchange.” The Apostle Paul so ably wrote,

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” Romans 3:21-26

Sanctification by Grace through Faith

The Biblical concept of sanctification comes from the Greek word, *hagios*, meaning to set apart and speaks of believers being set apart from the world unto God for His glory and purposes. The words “holy” and “saints” also come from this Greek word. Sanctification can be seen as having two aspects. Initial or definitive sanctification and progressive sanctification. Initial or definitive sanctification is when a believer is set apart to God at conversion. Some Scriptures that demonstrate this are:

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” Colossians 1:13

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." Romans 6:22

"But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Corinthians 6:11

Progressive sanctification refers to that life long process of progressing in holiness, growing in grace, and being conformed into the image of Christ. This is where we by God’s grace, “work out” our salvation in fear and trembling knowing that God is at work in us to will and to do His good pleasure. Phil 2:12-13. Some passages that teach this are:

“predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” Romans 8:29

"let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." 2 Corinthians 7:1

"For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness." 1 Thessalonians 4:7

"you also be holy in all your conduct, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy..." 1 Peter 1:15-16

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..." 2 Peter 3:18

Scripture teaches us that believers are still sinners, struggling against the old nature and pressing towards righteousness. Scripture also refers to believers as “saints”. There is a sense in which believers are “sinner – saints.” Romans 7 shows us our struggle in battling our sinfulness as believers. Romans 8 shows how we overcome that struggle as we are reassured in the Gospel, the good news that “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1

It is essential to remember that just like other aspects of our experience of salvation, sanctification is by grace through faith. Jerry Bridges calls this, “Gospel driven” sanctification:

“So sanctification involves hard work and dependence on Christ; what I call dependent effort. And it will always mean we are dissatisfied with our performance. For a growing Christian, desire will always outstrip performance or, at least, perceived performance. What is it then that will keep us going in the

face of this tension between desire and performance? The answer is the gospel. It is the assurance in the gospel that we have indeed died to the guilt of sin and that there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus that will motivate us and keep us going even in the face of this tension. We must always keep focused on the gospel because it is in the nature of sanctification that as we grow, we see more and more of our sinfulness. Instead of driving us to discouragement, though, this should drive us to the gospel. It is the gospel believed every day that is the only enduring motivation to pursue progressive sanctification even in those times when we don't seem to see progress. That is why I use the expression "gospel-driven sanctification" and that is why we need to "preach the gospel to ourselves every day."

Jerry Bridges, [Gospel Driven Sanctification](#)

It is important for us to understand that while the Holy Spirit moves in us and enables us in this process of sanctification by grace, God calls us to a real corresponding effort on our part resulting from a sense of gratitude for His redeeming love, and by grace through faith, in which we count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, deny ourselves, pick up our crosses to follow Christ, reckon our old self dead, etc., and we give ourselves over to living in light of the Gospel to the glory of God and of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is also sometimes called "Perseverance of the Saints."

Glorification

Glorification refers to the "glorified state" which will occur at the resurrection. The Lord will reunite our soul/spirit with our bodies in the resurrection to make us complete beings as God has intended from eternity for the praise of His glorious grace. The Golden Chain of Redemption in Romans 8 ends with this wonderful event, the dead in Christ are raised and glorified with resurrection bodies like that of the Lord Jesus Christ. From this great day forward we will always be with the Lord.

"Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control; will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." Philippians 3:20, 21 Also see 1 Cor. 15:35- 58; 2 Cor. 5:1-5; Rev. 21:4.

These glorified resurrection bodies having been transformed and made fit for eternity, will no longer be vulnerable to sin, death, sickness or sorrow.

Therefore God Commands Everyone Everywhere to Repent

This article of our statement of faith, "The Plan of God," ends with the following phrase:

"In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those He has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer."

We have shown that God has sovereignly chosen a people for His glory, a bride for His Son and that this election is unconditional in that it does not depend on the goodness or anything in the individual, but solely on the grace and eternal redeeming love of God. Now we see God's universal call to all humanity to repent and believe through the message of the Gospel, the forgiveness available through the cross of the only Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul declared:

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Acts 17: 30, 31

Many think that a sovereign grace, unconditional election contradicts God's call to evangelize and make disciples as Christ commanded in the Great Commission, but nothing could be further from the truth! The Apostle Paul recounts the conversion of the Thessalonians and then exhorts them to stand firm in the faith:

"But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter." 2 Thessalonians 2:13

Concerning this misconception about sovereign election and evangelism, Paul Helm writes:



"Many people struggle with God's sovereignty in election because they believe it excludes the activity of evangelism. If people are eternally elected or not, they ask, what good will preaching do? What difference will it make? However, as Scripture teaches, God's sovereignty in election and the activity of evangelism are not enemies but friends. Evangelism is rooted in election, and while man may plant and water the seed of the gospel, God brings the growth." Paul Helm, [The Sov. Of God & Evangelism](#)

Only our awesome God of the Bible would conceive of and accomplish such a wondrous plan of salvation. Moved in sovereign eternal love, He proactively chose a people, sent His Son to redeem that people, is bringing that people to Himself by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel of Sovereign Grace for His glory. In our next article we will look closer at this "good news" of the Gospel.

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