

# SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

## PART 10

### EXCURSUS: SOTERIOLOGY PART 9

[NOTE: Some issues were raised during and after the last class that require some additional discussion. That discussion follows in the attached notes.]

The point was made that the gospel is not Ephesians 2:8-9 where it says we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and that is quite correct. The gospel, the good news, is that we are saved by believing in the person and work of Christ Jesus. It is the content of what we believe and the object of that faith that saves. Right now I am defining the word grace for our Soteriology series but we aren't saved by believing in grace; we are saved by believing in the person and work of Christ Jesus who died for our sins, was buried (which is proof that He died), and was raised on the third day (which is proof that His work was acceptable to God on our behalf). People may or may not understand grace the moment they first believe. I am simply suggesting that Christianity only makes total, complete sense when grace is properly understood. So many people fail to understand grace and the result is some incorrect thinking about faith and works. This failure to understand grace leads to mixing sanctification issues into justification issues. That is the issue I am warning about concerning our understanding of grace. People can certainly be believers without understanding all the doctrinal ramifications of biblical Christianity including grace but there is confusion about some issues if grace is not properly understood.

I mentioned last week that my quest to understand the issues of justification, sanctification, and grace better was the result of my Dad's life. Other than attending a really liberal, apostate denominational church, there was nothing in his life that represented a Christian life well lived for the Lord. He was living a life that James characterized as "dead faith" (James 2:17). His faith was not apparent to other people but that doesn't mean he was an unbeliever. This seems to be evident in the fact that late in his life he was angered because so many family members wanted to insure he believed in Jesus and he kept getting asked about it. We could not tell from his life whether or not he really believed. His question to me was, "Why does everyone keep talking to me as though I don't believe in Jesus?" The answer is because his faith was not justified in the sight of men because it had no practical manifestation before others. But he did tell me that he believed he was a sinner in need of a Savior and that Savior was Christ Jesus. In my mind, that makes him a believer who will enjoy eternal life as a child of God in the family of God. Whether or not he was truly a believer is between him and God and one day I will know one way or the other because I will see him again or not but right now I

have no way of knowing. I have to rely on what he told me he believed. However, assuming he is a believer, I would not want to be in my Dad's shoes at the judgment seat of Christ. Here again, I don't know what he has done that may or may not be considered worthy of reward but I didn't see much. He did take his children to church when we were young so that we could hear about Jesus. But for the most part, I would say that his life was devoid of what Paul called "gold, silver, and precious stones" (1 Cor. 3:12) referring to the work done by, for, and to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, because he is a believer, he will be saved even as much of what he did in life is burned up as wood, hay, and straw. He will be saved as through fire (1 Cor. 3:15) but he will be saved. Living life as a believer but devoid of works that glorify the Lord will have eternal consequences in terms of loss of rewards. Rewards seem to be connected to positions of service to the Lord in the Millennium and beyond and those are desirable positions of service to him. Those who forfeit them in this life will forfeit them for eternity.

A question was raised last week concerning the method Billy Graham used to present the gospel to people during his evangelism crusades. I've never seen one of his crusades so I have no personal knowledge about his method of operation. The point was made that at the end of his presentation he would ask people who had just believed to come down to the front as a public profession of faith because "If we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). That is a really unnecessary imposition of some sort of work into the process. It is a sanctification passage and not a justification passage and I wouldn't use it in the way that he used it. I think he is abusing the meaning of that verse. The order in which he does things is important. If he presented the gospel and people believed that message first, then they received eternal life and what transpires after that is beside the point. But I think it does introduce some confusion into what is going on. If I were to say something about coming down to the front, I would make it for a specific purpose such as to have someone pray for/with the new believer or to offer them some guidance about what to do after they leave the crusade. I would make real sure it was understood to be voluntary and was for new believers. I would assure them that they don't have to come down in order to be saved. My answer is I'm not really OK with what he did because it is a bit of an abuse of Scripture that lends itself to confusion between justification and sanctification. The bottom line is this: if he convinced people that moving to the front of the stadium were part of justification, then he added works to the gospel presentation and nullified it. We just have to be very careful about how we present the gospel; it must be done with clarity in order to avoid confusing people about faith and works. The fact is that God can use even an imperfect presentation of the gospel to bring people to the knowledge of the truth and I'm sure hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people have been saved due to the evangelistic efforts of Billy Graham. I'm just suggesting we make sure to correctly do it from the beginning and thereby refrain from confusing anyone about the gospel.

I've frequently used Calvinism as a system of theology opposed to dispensational theology and Free Grace and some people may be wondering why I'm doing that. I've also used other theological systems to make a point but in this Soteriology series I've generally used Calvinism. There are two reasons for that. The first is that Calvinists have written so much more on these issues than anyone else. There is simply a lot of material available to use. The second reason is that they are vitriolic in their opposition to both dispensationalism and Free Grace. Those issues make them the perfect foil to use in fully explaining and in comparing and contrasting doctrinal issues.

All of the early dispensationalists were Calvinists to one degree or another and many still are. Chafer, Walvoord, and Ryrie would all fall into the category of four point Amyraldian Calvinists. That is, they do not hold to limited atonement but affirm the other four points of the TULIP acrostic—sort of. The problem I have with that is they really don't hold to the other four points of Calvinism either, at least the way that system defines them. They had to nuance what those other four points meant in terms of dispensationalism. Most of the dispensational free grace theologians I know today have generally abandoned all five points of Calvinism, or, at least, they embrace a more biblical understanding of them that flows from literal hermeneutics.

I don't agree with any of the five points of Calvinism the way they define them and I've already discussed most of them. The only issues I haven't discussed are election and irresistible grace and I will get to them in this section on key terms.

Total depravity is a biblical truth, but how so? Few dispensationalists would agree that it means total cessation and a person has to be regenerated by God in order to believe. Total depravity means separation and not inability to consider spiritual issues. How they consider spiritual issues is a valid question. I've already discussed this issue so I won't go into it again. I've also discussed limited atonement in great detail when I defined atonement so I won't go back over that doctrine again, either.

The concept behind irresistible grace is that all the elect must come to faith. God regenerates the elect person and then he finds God's grace irresistible and believes. They would make the claim that the only people who can finally resist God are those who are not elect. We have already discussed the notion that God regenerates a person, that is makes them spiritually alive which is the new birth, in order for them to have the capacity to believe and experience the new birth. God can be resisted and grace can be resisted but the Calvinist would say that is only because the person is non-elect. I would say the person is simply in rebellion against God and he is making a true decision to reject eternal life because he knows God and he is deliberately suppressing that truth in unrighteousness. As the pastor mentioned in his sermon a couple of weeks ago, people will go to the lake of fire because they want to go there.

I know of very few dispensational theologians who define perseverance of the saints as the Calvinists define it. We would rather say preservation of the saints which is the work of God in the life of the believer and is based on His promise alone. The doctrine of perseverance of the saints puts the responsibility for insuring salvation on the human being and that defeats assurance and eternal security. The doctrine of perseverance makes the claim that the person who fails to be obedient and faithful to the end of his life has proven he was never saved. They would also say that committing egregious personal sins proves it as well. That's a Lordship salvation mindset and very few dispensationalists agree with it. Perseverance is more properly understood as a sanctification issue and not a justification issue. Perseverance is about living a faithful Christian life in ways that glorify the Lord but the failure to do so does not mean that a person was unsaved all along. That is a serious difference between what we believe and what a Reformed Calvinist believes about perseverance.

My point is I'm using these issues to focus attention on sound doctrine and pointing out where we differ from this very common and prevalent theological system. I've also done that to some extent with other theological systems and I will continue to do so because I think it is instructive. Ultimately, I'm suggesting there is a connection between the literal hermeneutics of dispensational theology and understanding the Free Grace offer of salvation apart from any works whatsoever. Other systems cannot make that connection; they don't have that link, because they depart from literal hermeneutics and dispensational distinctions and thereby introduce works of one sort or another into the gospel.

The final point I want to bring up from last week concerns the drawing ministry of God. I have a very good theologian friend who called me and said he wasn't in agreement with what I was teaching concerning this drawing ministry and Romans 1. I'm going to briefly present his point of view as best as I can remember it so that you get another viewpoint on the issue. I'm not claiming that I completely understand all the ins and outs of this doctrine. I'm not insisting that anyone be in agreement with me on the way this drawing ministry of God works. I'm simply presenting the way I think it works. Here is his thinking on the issue.

Romans 1-3 is presenting man as totally fallen and rejecting God (which is true. The question then becomes one of how does the small group of people who will come to faith out of this set of fallen humanity come to faith?). The only way this is overcome is through special revelation. The drawing ministry of God presented in John is also done only through special revelation. Due to the rejection of God by all of mankind, the knowledge of God documented in Romans 1:18-19 and through general revelation are no longer operative because they are suppressed and rejected. That's why missionaries

need to be sent to unsaved people (which is also true. But why do people listen to a missionary and ultimately decide to believe—or not? It flows from the drawing ministry of God. No one has to listen to a missionary just because one shows up.). God's elective choice is operative and limited to some extent in determining those who come to faith and who will as the result of belief be given by the Father to the Son. In other words, he sees an element of divine election or choice operative in the situation. There are people groups around the world who have never heard of Christ and the cross and never will; therefore, they are eternally lost and without hope. They have no chance of being saved apart from divine disclosure of special revelation. People will always choose the "bad" when left to themselves (which is true. But I'm saying they aren't entirely being left to themselves through the drawing ministry of the Triune God.). Libertarian free will is rejected (which is true concerning spiritual matters. In many other matters of life, man seems to have the freedom to decide many of life's issues.).

It is certainly true that no one can come to faith apart from special revelation. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). The question is, does this drawing ministry of the Triune God at times have any sort of preliminary, preparatory work before that? It doesn't have to happen, of course, but is it precluded? Special revelation can be there from the start but is it always? Is God's call unlimited due to general revelation, the knowledge of God people intrinsically possess because God put it there, and their God-given conscience, through His drawing ministry or is it limited to only those who are in a position to receive special revelation? How do we reconcile this with the fact that some revelation indicates that God wants everyone to be saved and the Lord bids come to all who are willing to come and freely partake? These are all questions that need to be answered in order to figure out how people come to hear, understand, and accept or reject the grace gospel message. Could it be that it isn't as cut and dried or as neat and tidy as some theological systems try to make it? God doesn't think like we think and His ways are not like our ways. If God decided in eternity past to save only some people that He has elected to be saved and to pass over all the others to perdition, who are we to argue against that? On the other hand, if He gave mankind total free will to believe or not, who are we to argue with that? He's God and His will and His plan are all that matters. The question is, does either of these positions represent what He has revealed? I'm suggesting there is a vast middle ground between these extremes that contains the truth. That's what I am trying to find. The fact these discussions even exist tells us this isn't easy.

None of this discussion is critical to the issue of the grace gospel. We all agree that man must hear and believe the gospel in order to receive eternal life and that comes from special revelation. However, we also want to properly understand the entire range of revelation we have received and we attempt to do this by employing literal hermeneu-

tics. We want to understand these doctrinal issues to the extent they have been revealed.

My theologian friend suggested that perhaps he is more Calvinist in his theology and I am more Arminian is neither one of us is a Calvinist and neither one of us is an Arminian; to the extent that biblical truth is found in either, or any other, system, is perfectly fine and we are comfortable embracing and adhering to such truth. All truth is sourced in the Word of God. We are both Biblicists adhering to literal hermeneutics in an effort to understand revelation. We are dispensationalists who hold to a Free Grace gospel. How we get to that gospel is what we are trying to understand right now this doctrinal study of Soteriology. In the final analysis each and every one of us is responsible for studying these things and coming to a biblical conclusion. Eternal life is not in the balance here and it is not an issue; coming to a biblically correct understanding of this doctrine is the issue.

## GRACE, PART 2

Grace is simply a free gift. "By free, we mean that it is totally undeserved; nothing a person does, commits, surrenders, or promises can earn merit or grace. It is therefore an unconditional gift. By *unconditional* we mean that God, as the Giver of grace, does not put any such conditions on people before they can receive His gift. When someone tries to earn the gift of grace, it ceases to be grace" [Charles C. Bing, *Simply by Grace: An Introduction to God's Life-Changing Gift*, p. 18]. This is why it is imperative to insure we are preaching the one true gospel of grace. Adding any sort of human works or effort whether in the front end as a requirement for justification or by backloading work of any sort into salvation as proof that one is saved, defeats grace and nullifies justification.

"Divine salvation is...the kindness of God toward sinners. It is not less than it would be had they sinned less. It is not more than it would be had they sinned more. It is wholly unrelated to every question of human merit. Grace is neither treating a person as he deserves, nor treating a person better than he deserves. It is treating a person graciously without the slightest reference to his deserts. Grace is infinite love expressing itself in infinite goodness. Through the death of Christ by which He took away the sin of the world, and through the divine decree which has constituted all to be 'under sin,' grace is free to save in every case, and only grace can save in any case. Divine grace is never decreased or increased. It offers a standardized, unvarying blessing to every individual alike. The blessing is measureless since it represents in every case no less than all that God, being actuated by infinite love, can do" [Chafer, *Grace*, pp. 24-25].

One of the hallmarks of the fallen soul seems to be that man can somehow make himself better through his own efforts as though he can make himself acceptable to God or at least assist God in making him acceptable but that thought is completely wrong. Man can do nothing to make himself acceptable God. God has made a way for man to be acceptable but it is totally God's work that makes it possible. God's work in justifi-

cation is based in His grace. We don't deserve it and we can't earn it but He makes it available to us in Christ Jesus. Every one of us was an underserving, sinful, rebellious, ungodly person when God, in His grace, drew us to Him and saved us.

Paul clearly explained that work of any kind cannot merit justification; rather, work results in a debt owed for services rendered. We cannot work our way to God whether it is by moral living or through charitable endeavors or by obedience to a religious system or simply by being a good person in the sight of other people. When our faith is credited as righteousness, it is God's grace in operation. God did all that was necessary to make us savable. The only requirement placed on human beings to be saved is faith and that is not a work.

Romans 4:4-5 <sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor [χάρις], but as what is due. <sup>5</sup>But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

Romans 11:6 <sup>6</sup>But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

People are in rebellion; they are alienated from God in their father Adam. Human beings have no capacity whatsoever to save themselves. Everything people do is tainted by sin and rebellion and is therefore worthless. The only way that man can be reconciled to God is through God's gracious provision, totally undeserved, and completely unearned.

Somehow, some way, human beings are part of God's plan to put on display His amazing grace, love, and mercy to the entire creation by making a way for ungodly people to be adopted into the family of God.

Ephesians 2:7 <sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

"God's supreme motive is nothing less than His purpose to demonstrate before all intelligences—principalities and powers, celestial beings, and terrestrial beings—the exceeding riches of His grace. This God will do by means of that gracious thing which He does through Christ Jesus. All intelligences will know the depth of sin and the hopeless estate of the lost. They will, in turn, behold people redeemed and saved from that estate appearing in the highest glory—like Christ. This transformation will measure and demonstrate the 'exceeding riches of his grace'" [Chafer, *Grace*, p. 37].