

God Calls of His Own Good Pleasure

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: 2 Timothy 1:5-7

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Near the end of his life, Paul wrote a stirring farewell letter to his son in the faith, Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1, Paul reminded his protégé of 5 vital truths. In verse 5, he notes the existence of Timothy's faith in Jesus Christ. In verses 6 and 7, Paul gives encouragement to his beloved friend to use his God given gift made fruitful with the energy of God's power. That same power would provide endurance for difficult times. Finally, Paul reminded Timothy in verses 9 and 10 of the endowment of God's grace in salvation through Jesus Christ.

This last truth, in particular, has become distorted in current Christianity. Since the 1800s, Christian thought has increasingly taught a salvation by synergism. Synergism describes the condition where 2 or more people or groups of people combine their talents together to yield a result greater than either of the parties could on their own. Each party contributes something to the mix, and the result exceeds their contribution.

In steadily increasing waves, the Christian world has accepted and taught salvation through synergistic cooperation. God contributes His part, mankind his. Each contributes to the result called salvation. Many accept this false notion about salvation. The exclusion of the message of God's grace in salvation and the emphasis upon man's actions confirm it.

A Christianity of this form deifies mankind and denies glory to God for His marvelous grace. In addition, it grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit. As a natural result, the Church of Jesus Christ today lacks spiritual power and God's glorious presence. I am convinced that the Body of Christ faces a crossroads. We desperately need a spiritual reformation and revival.

To once again experience the outpouring of God's glorious presence, we must re-examine the Bible for God's truth regarding salvation by grace. That knowledge will convict believers and lead them to confess their sins of unbelief and disobedience. Upon complete repentance, spiritual reformation and revival will follow.

It is this express truth that Paul reminded Timothy to heed: God's glorious salvation in Christ Jesus by grace. From this passage, I want to examine with you 3 simple yet significant truths about salvation by grace. I pray that the Holy Spirit will apply these truths to your life today and bring a spiritual transformation to you.

Author of salvation

Unfortunately, a number of un-truths have surfaced in the Church of Jesus Christ regarding the plan of salvation. Some describe the death of Jesus Christ as an “OOPS” plan, or Plan B. Somehow, they say, God was surprised by plans that went awry, and the death of Jesus resulted. Others view His death as an unfortunate accident or a subversive political plot, making Jesus a martyr, and nothing more.

The truth of the matter is that God the Father designed the plan of salvation. Paul makes reference to the Father in verse 9 with the pronoun, “Who.” It clearly takes one back to the preceding verse which talks about God. It is He Who, under no obligation to make such a provision, originated the blueprint for salvation. As verse 9 declares, in eternity past, He authored Christ's substitutionary death on the cross, before the world began.

There is ample evidence in Scripture to prove it. For example, the Bible clearly prophesied the unusual events surrounding the death of Jesus. It tells of His betrayal by a friend and describes the plot of the rulers to crucify Christ. It foretells the false witnesses against Jesus. These few citations along with many others show the exact, precise detail of Bible prophesy about the death of Jesus Christ.

None more clearly shows the divine, eternal aspects of the design than Peter's defense on the Day of Pentecost. Note the clarity of Peter's statement in Acts 2.22-23:

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: {23} Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:"

The Bible plainly reveals the eternity of God's plan of redemption. It gives us the truth about God and His relationship with mankind. That is why we must place our emphasis where it belongs, upon God and not mankind. He deserves the glory for His grace.

Act of salvation

Paul then builds upon the divine authorship of salvation to describe how it impacts sinful man. First, he makes the simple statement, “Who hath saved us...” It identifies the true condition of those saved; they are lost. Mankind without Jesus Christ is lost in complete, sinful depravity which makes man totally helpless to save himself. The just judgment of God hangs like a Damoclean sword over the head of all humanity. The human race needs Someone to do for them what they cannot do themselves.

In grace, God by the Holy Spirit acts upon sinners and brings them into the state of salvation. He reconciles sinners to Himself. He pardons their sins. He delivers His chosen ones from corruption and moral impurity. In short, Paul reminds Timothy that salvation is

something done by God in grace through the Holy Spirit Who applies the work of Jesus Christ to sinful men and women.

Note next that Paul says “(Who) called us...” Here, the Apostle reminds Timothy that God takes the initiative in salvation. It is God Who calls, not mankind who seeks. This identifies a crucial distinction. For it has become popular today to imagine that man has some degree of natural morality and ability to pursue his own salvation.

But Scripture abundantly confirms the truth stated here. God seeks mankind, not the reverse. For example, Paul declares in Romans 3:11:

"There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God."

Further, the prophet Isaiah clearly describes the condition of sinners when he states in Isaiah 64:6-7:

"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. {7} And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities."

Finally, Jesus Himself stated in John 6:44:

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."

No doubts or questions should linger. Mankind does not seek God. God seeks and calls sinners and brings them to repentance, or no one would respond to the gospel message. As added evidence, the word called does not mean an offer. An offer suggests that the final decision to accept or deny rests upon the offeree. However, the term used by Paul is different. It includes the getting. This complies with the effectual work of the Holy Spirit in salvation upon those whom He calls.

In these 2 statements, the Apostle clearly describes the act of salvation. It rests clearly with the Triune God Who calls and Who applies the completed work of Jesus Christ on behalf of the Father's chosen ones.

Next, the passage reveals the basis upon which God makes His call. The writer states it in a negative form, "...not according to our works." Therefore, no one can self-qualify for this effectual call of God through any self-effort. Nor does it result from any good thing that could be seen in any person.

To state it positively, the call of God rests solely upon His free grace. He chose a special people unto Himself by His own free choice. As the balance of the verse declares, it oc-

curred "...before the world began." In the ages of eternity past, God planned, decreed, and completed the redemption of His grace-called ones.

Again, the abundant Scriptural evidence confirms these truths. None can more clearly state them than these 3 references:

1. Ephesians 1:3-6: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: {4} 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: {5} Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, {6} To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."
2. Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: {9} Not of works, lest any man should boast."
3. Titus 3:5-6: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; {6} Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;"

Praise God! Salvation does not rest on totally helpless mankind, but on God. He reconciles completely depraved sinners unto Himself and brings them into salvation. He delivers from sin, corruption, and moral impurity. He pardons from sin. Do not exalt mankind and deny glory to God by wrong belief. Let the Scriptures sound forth the amazing truth, God saves sinners.

Aim of salvation

In 2 Timothy 1.10, Paul reminds his dear friend of the aim of salvation. Although the Apostle does not elaborate upon all the benefits that salvation brings, he does outline 2 of them.

First, he states that salvation by grace through Jesus Christ abolishes death. In common practice, the word abolish means to do away with. But that clearly cannot apply here. In the more literal translation, the term carries the sense to render idle or to make of no effect.

In the beginning, death fell upon all men as a judgment for sin. But for the believer in Christ, the cross and resurrection of Christ makes physical death of no effect and cancels spiritual death. For the child of God, death is no longer a trap door to hell and eternal damnation, but a gateway to life eternal with God. He has removed the sting of death and delivered the Christian from the second death.

Again, the Bible plainly verifies this truth. For we read in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57:

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. {55} O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? {56} The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. {57} But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Second, the Holy Spirit through Paul states in 2 Timothy 1.10 that salvation by grace through Jesus Christ revealed life and immortality. God's redemptive plan made it possible for sinners to become a partaker of His eternal life. In grace, God gives to His chosen people a supernatural quality and quantity of life. At the second birth, a new kind of life, God's life, comes to dwell within the children of God. That life brings immortality and everlasting existence with God.

In the book of Colossians, Paul reminded his friends of these very truths. Note his encouragement in Colossians 1:12-13:

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: {13} Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:"

In grace, God has indeed made great provision in Jesus Christ for His children.

Application of truth

I pray that the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to see the doctrinal knowledge of salvation revealed in this passage. These truths of righteousness describe the character and nature of God as well as mankind. They define God's relationship with mankind and mankind's relationship with God.

They tell us what to avoid and what to adopt. It shows false doctrine and sinful practices. It gives instruction to believe that will mold the Christian's judgment to conform to the truth.

Where has the Holy Spirit identified your failure to apply these truths in your life? Have you failed to believe and to obey the truths presented in this passage? Whether caused by ignorance, rebellion, or self-satisfaction, the result is the same. Self-effort and self-righteousness glorify mankind. They deny the honor to God that He rightly deserves.

The convicting work of the Holy Spirit convinces you of your true condition before God. For the believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit identifies the guilt of sin that grieves and quenches His work in your life. This sinfulness brings disapproval, reproof, and judgment for sin. It breaks the fellowship between the Father and His child.¹ But, you can find forgiveness of sin through Jesus.⁽²⁾

As an unbeliever, the Spirit shows you the guilt of sin that confirms your lost, ruined condition which deserves God's eternal judgment. He identifies your helplessness and your inability to save yourself. He has revealed God's grace and mercy in His provision in Jesus Christ for sinners. To you He says, "Repent and believe the gospel."(3)

I pray that you will reject the refuge of lies that keep you from faith and obedience. May God open your eyes to recognize His requirements upon your life. I pray that He will bring you to repentance and apply these truths in your life. May He bring a spiritual transformation to you today.

References

1. Isaiah 59.1-2; 1 John 1.6; 1 John 2.3-6
2. 1 John 1.9; 1 John 2.1
3. Mark 1.15

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