

The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3–14

Code: 80-46

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 1:3-14 is a paean of praise from the heart of the apostle Paul. It is not a cool theological argument, but the passionate overflow of Paul's thankful heart. In Greek it is one long sentence. The Spirit of God inspired Paul to lavish praise on the God who saved him.

A. The Passage

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. "

B. The Persons

1. The Father

Dominating these verses is the idea that God has brought about salvation by His own will, purpose, and design. Salvation does not result from anyone's will or merit. It is not achieved by religious sacrifice or good intentions. The credit for salvation belongs to God alone and only He may be praised and glorified.

2. The Son

Salvation is the work of God mediated through Christ. Salvation is both in Christ (vv. 4, 7, 10-13) and through Him (v. 5). It is in the Beloved, who is Christ (v. 6). It was purposed in Him (v. 9). While salvation is solely the work of God, it is wrought through Christ.

3. The Spirit

Salvation is sealed by the Holy Spirit (v. 13). He is the Holy Spirit of promise, given to us as a pledge of our inheritance--the guarantee of our full and future redemption as God's own possession. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are given all the credit for salvation.

LESSON

I. GOD CHOSE US (vv. 3-4)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. "

A. Paul's Affirmation

Paul opens this passage by affirming that God receives all the praise in salvation. The verb translated "He chose" (Gk. , ekleg[ma]o) is used reflexively, meaning "to pick for oneself. " That means the action of the verb is turned back on the person doing the action. Paul was saying that God chose us for His own sake--for Himself personally. His choice of the saved was made before the world began.

B. Scripture's Accord

Scripture affirms the truth of the redemptive choice of God.

1. Matthew 25:34--Jesus said, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. " The Lord designed both His kingdom and its inhabitants before the world began. You and I are saved and know the Lord Jesus Christ because God chose us.

2. Luke 12:32--Jesus said to his disciples. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. "

3. John 6:44--To a large crowd Jesus proclaimed, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me [compels] draws him. "

4. John 15:16--Jesus said to the disciples, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit. " We didn't choose Him; He chose us. We didn't decide for Christ in the truest sense--He decided for us.

5. Acts 9:15--The Lord said of the apostle Paul, "He is a chosen instrument of Mine. " The conversion of Paul was most abrupt--he was on his way to persecute Christians. Yet he was converted, transformed, and called to be an apostle because God had chosen him before the world began.

6. Acts 13:48--Of those who heard Paul and Barnabus preaching, "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. " God grants the gift of faith only to those who are predestined to salvation by His own choice.

7. 2 Thessalonians 2:13--"We should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation. " Paul didn't thank the Thessalonians for deciding to become saved. It wasn't that they were bright enough, clever enough, spiritual enough, or insightful enough to choose God; rather God had chosen them from the beginning. Salvation requires faith on our part, but that faith is the result of God's choice.

8. 2 Timothy 1:9--God "has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity. "

9. First Peter 1:1-2--Believers are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that [they] may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood. "

10. Revelation 13:8; 17:8--Believers were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world.

C. Theology's Agreement

Only God gets credit for our salvation. The doctrine of election is the most humbling in all Scripture. God selected people to be made holy that they might be with Him forever. Our faith comes from Him. An anonymous lyricist put it this way in the hymn "The Inner Life": "I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me; it was not I that found, O Saviour true; no, I was found of Thee. "

II. GOD PREDESTINED US (v. 5)

"In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will. "

A. Paul's Affirmation

By God's previously determined choice, we were destined to adoption as His sons. Indeed, we are the children of God.

B. Scripture's Accord

1. John 1:12--To "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God. "

2. Romans 8:15--"You have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'"

3. Galatians 3:26--"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. "

4. Galatians 4:6-7--"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. "

5. 1 John 3:1--"How great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God. "

C. Theology's Agreement

God's predetermined choice did not depend on what He saw in us. He did it "according to the kind intention of His will" (v. 5). God did not choose us because He had to, but because He wanted to--it gave Him pleasure. God Himself said, "My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure" (Isa. 46:10).

III. GOD GRACED US (v. 6)

"To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. "

A. Paul's Affirmation

God's choice and our predestination became a reality in our lives through His grace. Grace is undeserved favor, unearned blessing, and unmerited kindness. We are saved by grace.

B. Scripture's Accord

1. Ephesians 2:8--"By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. " God's grace does not allow any credit to man.

2. Acts 15:11--"We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. "

3. Acts 18:27--"When [Paul] had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace. " The only way anyone believes is when God graciously gives the ability to believe. God's grace is undeserved, unmerited, and unearned--but is given anyway.

4. Romans 3:24--We are justified "as a gift by His grace. "

C. Theology's Agreement

The phrase in verse 6 is literally translated "by grace we have been graced. " God graced us in Christ the beloved, bringing to pass His choice and our predetermined destiny by making us His children.

IV. GOD REDEEMED US (v. 7a)

"In Him we have redemption through His blood. "

A. Paul's Affirmation

1. From what

God bought us out of our slavery to sin, death, hell, Satan and demons, the fallen flesh, and the world. Worthless and hopeless, with darkened minds and hearts bent on evil, we were unworthy slaves--yet He still came and bought us from the slave market. We were bought because we were predestined, predestined because we were chosen, chosen because we were loved, and loved because it was God's good pleasure to do so.

2. Through what

Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death. " Christ redeemed us through His shed blood. That was not an easy price to pay. He had to take on human form, come into the world, and die on a cross--pouring out His blood in sacrifice for sin. Christ's blood is indeed precious.

B. Scripture's Accord

1. 1 Peter 1:18-19--"You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. "

2. Revelation 5:9--Of Christ it is said, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. "

V. GOD FORGAVE US (v. 7b)

"The forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. "

A. Paul's Affirmation

God not only bought us, but forgave us our sins--past, present, and future.

B. Scripture's Accord

1. Matthew 26:28--Jesus said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. " When God forgives (Gk. , aph[ma]emi, "to send away never to return") He

removes our sins as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12), buries them in the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19), and remembers them no more (Isa. 43:25).

2. Micah 7:18--"Who is God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?"

3. Romans 8:1--"There is . . . no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. "

4. Ephesians 4:32--"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. "

5. Colossians 2:13--"When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions. "

6. 1 John 2:12--The apostle John said, "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. "

C. Theology's Agreement

God's forgiveness was lavished on us through the riches of His grace. It took a lot of grace because we had a lot of sin. The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:21-35) affirms that we have an unpayable, indescribable debt. We owe our salvation to the God who wanted us to be His own. We are forgiven despite our unworthiness.

VI. GOD ENLIGHTENED US (vv. 8-10a)

"In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. "

A. Paul's Affirmation

When we are saved, we are enlightened. God has given us a picture of how everything on earth and in heaven will be brought together in Christ to His praise. He has enlightened us with wisdom in eternal things and prudence in earthly things.

B. Scripture's Accord

1. 1 Corinthians 2:12--"We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God. "

2. 1 Corinthians 2:16--"Who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. "

3. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4--"Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. "

4. 1 John 2:27--"The anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you. "

C. Theology's Agreement

God enlightened us because He wanted to. Apart from His good pleasure we would remain in darkness, unable to participate in His plan.

VII. GOD PROMISED US (vv. 10b-12)

"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. "

A. Paul's Affirmation

God predestined us to be His children, and His children will receive His inheritance.

B. Scripture's Accord

1. Romans 8:18--"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. "

2. 1 John 3:2--"It has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, We shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. "

3. 1 Peter 1:4--We have "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven. "

4. 2 Corinthians 1:20--"As many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes. "

C. Theology's Agreement

All of God's promises--peace, love, wisdom, eternal life, joy, victory--are ours according to God's promise. They are promised to us not by right, but in accordance with God's grace. He gets all the glory.

VIII. GOD SEALED US (vv. 13-14)

"In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. "

A. Paul's Affirmation

Paul here declares that our inheritance is secure because God sealed us.

B. Theology's Agreement

Sealing in ancient times was a sign of ownership, security, authenticity, and the completion of a transaction. The Holy Spirit's dwelling in a believer signifies that believers are owned, secured, authenticated, and completed by God. We wait for full redemption and are indwelt by the Spirit as a seal and guarantee of our inheritance (Rom. 8:23-24).

CONCLUSION

Only God deserves credit for our salvation. God saved us by His own free will, yet from our perspective we do two things: we hope in Christ (v. 12) and we believe in Him (v. 13). That too is to God's own praise and glory (v. 12). God gives us the power to hope in Christ. Our faith comes from Him (Eph. 2:8-9). He opens our ears to hear the message of truth, and enables us to believe. The entire process of salvation is energized by the Holy Spirit, without whom no one could ever hope or believe.

Jesus said that all who don't believe in God's Son are condemned (John 3:18). God in His sovereign grace has chosen to save those whom He has set His love (Rom. 9:8-13). They are picked out of the stream of helpless men and women cascading into hell. That is a humbling truth, and should result in immense gratitude on our part. Why did God choose us and not others? Not because we deserve salvation but to demonstrate "the riches of His glory" (Rom. 9:14-23). Therefore our only proper response is, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Focusing on the Facts

1. Is there anything that will save a person apart from the sovereign work of God? Why or why not?
2. What member(s) of the Trinity are at work in salvation?
3. Why are some chosen for salvation (Eph. 1:4)?

4. Is Paul the only writer in the Bible who wrote about election? Support your answer with Scripture?
5. Did God's choice for salvation depend on how good he saw certain people would be? Explain your answer (Eph. 1:5)?
6. How much of God's grace do we deserve?
7. When Christ died on the cross, what were Christians redeemed from?
8. When God forgives our sins, what memory of them does He retain?
9. What happens at salvation so that we can understand God and His plan (Eph. 1:8-10)?
10. Why will we obtain an inheritance from God (Eph. 1:10-12)?
11. Christians are sealed with the Spirit. What does that mean (Eph. 1:13-14)?
12. By what means are we enabled to hope and believe in Christ (Eph. 1:12-13)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Our age loudly proclaims man's self-importance. Commercials tell us we deserve a break, a better car, better food, better clothing--more of the "good life." Mankind's problems are often diagnosed as a lack of self-esteem. Yet the Bible says that "all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Rom. 3:12). Far from affirming man's esteem for himself, Scripture puts these words in the mouth of the discerning: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away" (Isa. 64:6, NIV). For God to be properly honored and glorified, why must every Christian understand that salvation is a work of pure grace?
2. The work of God in salvation reflects upon the nature of both God and man. When John wrote, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God" (1 John 3:1), he was commenting on God's great love and man's corruption. Thomas Watson wrote, "To make you thankful, consider, when you had offended God, he called you; when God needed you not, but had millions of glorified saints and angels to praise him, he called you. Consider what you were before God called you." (Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978 reprint], p. 225). The doctrine of sovereign election, properly understood, produces profound gratitude to God in the hearts of believers. How has it affected your life?

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