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1
The Need for Salvation

A THOROUGH DISCUSSION of the need for salvation would require a separate volume on biblical anthropology; but a failure to outline certain salient features in this area would greatly disadvantage our consideration of the doctrine of salvation (soteriology). Whenever the church proclaims the good news of salvation, modern man asks, Salvation from what, and why?

MAN'S SIN

If these questions are answered in biblical terms the reply is, From sin so that we may live in fellowship with God and those of like faith both here and hereafter.

NATURE OF SIN

We must ask, what is sin? To this question the Westminster Catechism correctly responds, "Sin is any want of conformity to the law of God, or transgression of it" (cf. 1 John 3:4). This definition is consistently biblical as far as it goes but it stops short at a crucial point. Sin, as biblically described, is not only a failure to obey the law of God and/or a violation of it; it is also—and perhaps even more significantly—a deification of self and a dethronement of God. It is the disruption of the creature's personal relationship with his Creator.

As the Puritan Ralph Venning writes,

> In short, sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of his mercy, the jeer of his patience, the slight of his power, the contempt of his love. . . . We may go on and say, it is the upbraiding of his providence (Psalm 50), the scoff of his promise (2 Peter 3:3-4), the reproach of his wisdom (Isaiah 29:16).[1]

TRANSMISSION OF SIN

Adam's sin has been imputed to all by virtue of the fact of the solidarity of the race and the principle of representation (cf. Rom. 5:12 ff.). All sinned representatively in the one and therefore all inherit a sinful nature from which flows every sinful act. The root of man's perversity is the sinful nature inherited because of his fall in Adam; the fruits are the sinful works which he does (Gal. 5:19-21). Man's predicament is the result of his wickedness—inherited and actual.

Man as a Sinner

Brunner, Emil. *Man in Revolt; A Christian Anthropology.* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947.

Custance, Arthur. *Man in Adam and in Christ.* The Doorway Papers. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.

McDonald, H. D. *The Christian View of Man.* Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1981.

Murray, John. *The Imputation of Adam's Sin.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959.

Shedd, Russell Philip. *Man in Community.* London: Epworth, 1958. Reprint. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.

MAN'S PREDICAMENT

The result of sin is estrangement from God, one's fellowman, and even from oneself. Man is a victim of anxiety, frustration, dread, and despair. Life seems ultimately meaningless, absurd, just a rat race; there is no exit from its fixed maze. With "the preacher" (*Qoheleth*) of old, man concludes, "I observed all the deeds done under the sun, and saw that all was an empty breath and a grasping at the wind" (Eccles. 1:14, Anchor Bible).

Signs of man's desperateness continually scream at us from the press, radio, and television. They show up clearly in the lyrics of some rock music groups. If we are to meet today's challenge we must study the forms in which man expresses his interpretation of existence. These

1. Ralph Venning, *The Plague of Plagues* (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 32.

forms would include the scientific, economic, political, ethical, and artistic realms.

Man's Predicament

Anderson, Ray S. *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

Evans, C. Stephen. *Existentialism: The Philosophy of Despair and the Quest for Hope.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.

Guinness, Os. *Dust of Death.* Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1973.

Schaeffer, Francis A. *Escape from Reason.* London: Inter-Varsity, 1968.

———. *The God Who Is There.* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968.

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture.* New York: Oxford U., 1959. (See esp. chapter 6, "Protestantism and Artistic Style.")

The Discovery Series. New York: Association.

Discovery in Drama, 1969.

Discovery in Song, 1968.

Discovery in Word, 1968.

Discovery in the Press, 1969.

Discovery in Film, 1969.

Man is by nature totally depraved. This does not mean that every man is as bad as he can possibly be. Rather, it means that the principle of sin has pervaded every aspect of his nature and he is totally incapable of achieving his own salvation.

The functioning of his intellect has become darkened by sin so that he cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God. Paul states, "An unspiritual man does not accept the things that the Spirit of God teaches, for they are nonsense to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are appreciated by spiritual insight" (1 Cor. 2:14, *Williams*).

Paul has been speaking of that revelation given to the apostolic circle in words taught by the Holy Spirit (v. 13). Much of this material now comprises the verbally inspired ("God-breathed") canon of holy Scripture. In verse 14 the apostle next indicates that these things ("the things that the Spirit of God teaches") were not known by the natural, or unspiritual, man. Special revelation, not general, is under consideration in this passage.

By "unspiritual man" Paul means that man who is only worldly-wise, the man bounded by the things of this life, the unregenerate man. Such a man does not *accept* the things of the Spirit. The verb translated "accept" has in it the idea of welcoming, being the usual word for re-

ceiving a guest. Thus the thought is that the natural man does not welcome the things of the Spirit; he refuses them, he rejects them. He is without the necessary ability to discern the revelations of God's Spirit.

Paul now states the reasons why the natural man does not welcome the things of God. First, to an unenlightened mind they are "nonsense"—absurd, insipid, powerless. It is interesting to note that our English word *moron* is derived from the Greek term employed here. The things of the Spirit of God are quite literally moronic to the sinner.

Second, it is asserted that the unbeliever *cannot* understand them. The unrenewed man cannot even begin to discern the truth of divine things. It is not simply that he will not; he cannot. When we inquire as to why he cannot, we discover that it is not because of a faulty functioning of the powers of logical reasoning as such but rather because of a failure to reckon with all pertinent data—data made available only by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Other passages which ought to be noted in this regard are: Romans 3:11; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Titus 1:15; Ephesians 5:8; 2 Peter 2:14.

Thomas Boston writes:

> There is a natural weakness in the minds of men, with respect to spiritual things: the apostle determines concerning every one that is not endued with the graces of the Spirit, "That he is blind and cannot see afar off" 2 Pet. 1:9. . . . Many that are eagle-eyed in the trifles of time, are like owls and bats in the light of life. Nay, truly, the life of every natural man is but one continued dream and delusion, out of which he never awakes, till either, by a new light darted from heaven into his soul, he comes to himself (Luke 15:17), or "in hell he lift up his eyes;" (Luke 16:23). Therefore, in Scripture account, be he never so wise, he is a fool, and a simple one.[2]

Third, it is stated that the unbeliever cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned. According to Leon Morris, the verb translated "discern"

> is that used in a legal sense of the preliminary examination prior to the main hearing (the corresponding noun is used of such a preliminary examination in Acts 25:26). It comes to mean "to scrutinize," "to examine," and so "to judge of," "to estimate." It may be that the use of a verb proper to such a preliminary examination is by way of reminding us that all human verdicts are no more than preliminary. It is God who gives the final verdict. Be that as it may, Paul is insisting that the man whose equipment is only of this world, the man who has not received the Holy Spirit of God, has not the ability to make an estimate of things spiritual.[3]

2. Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (London: Banner of Truth, 1964), 79 ff.
3. Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 60.

Man's will is bound in servitude to sin. Again Paul states, "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8, NASB*). Regarding this passage Martin Luther wrote, "Now let us see what Paul thinks about endeavour and the power of "freewill" in carnal men. . . . Let the guardian of 'free-will' answer the following question: How can endeavours towards good be made by that which is death, and displeases God, and is enmity against God, and disobeys God, and cannot obey him?"[4]

Calvin comments,

> Paul. . . declares that our heart is so swollen with hardness and unconquerable obstinacy that it is never moved to submit to the yoke of God naturally. He is not arguing about one or other of the affections, but uses an indefinite expression to cover all the emotions which arise within us. Let the Christian heart therefore drive far from itself the non-Christian philosophy of the freedom of the will, and let every one of us acknowledge himself to be, as in reality he is, the servant of sin, that he may be freed by the grace of Christ and set at liberty. It is the height of folly to boast of any other freedom.[5]

We may diagram man's threefold state in respect to the problem of the will as follows:

ORIGINAL STATE	FALLEN STATE	REDEEMED STATE	
		Present Aspect	Future Aspect
Power not to sin but able to sin	Power only to sin	Power not to sin but able to sin	Not able to sin
Freedom of the will	Bondage of the will	Freedom of the will	Freedom of the will
ADAM AND EVE	THOSE IN THE FIRST ADAM	THOSE IN THE LAST ADAM	THOSE IN THE LAST ADAM

**New American Standard Bible.*

4. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Westwood, N. J.: Revell, 1957), 300.
5. John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians,* Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 8, Ross Mackenzie, trans., and D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 163.

There are several things to note regarding fallen man.

1. Fallen man may not do an absolute good.

2. He may, and frequently does, do relative good because of God's common grace.

3. The fallen man's choices fall within the context of a servitude to sin (Rom. 6:17, 20).

4. The only way out of this bondage to sin is God's redeeming grace.

Man's emotions are base, inordinate. The writer of Proverbs speaks of the wicked, for example, "Who delight in doing evil, and exult in evil's perversity" (Prov. 2:14, *New Berkeley*).

Arminius gives a very clear statement of man's state before and after the fall.

> In his primitive condition as he came out of the hands of his Creator, man was endowed with such a portion of knowledge, holiness and power, as enabled him to understand, esteem, consider, will, and to perform THE TRUE GOOD, according to the commandment delivered to him. Yet none of these acts could he do, *except through the assistance of Divine Grace.* But in his *lapsed and sinful state,* man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, affections or will, and in all his powers, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good.[6]

The prophet Jeremiah sums it up well: "The heart [man in the totality of his being] is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9, KJV*). In the words of Paul, the natural man is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1).

Man's Bondage to Sin

Berkouwer, G. C. *Sin.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971.

Jaspers, Karl. *Man in the Modern Age.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Anchor, 1957.

Trueblood, Elton. *The Predicament of Modern Man.* New York: Harper, Chapel, 1944.

Venning, Ralph. *The Plague of Plagues.* London: Banner of Truth, 1965.

**King James Version.*

6. James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 252.

2
The Basis of Salvation

WE MUST MAKE a distinction here between the ultimate basis and the instrumental basis of salvation: The former involves God's sovereign electing grace, the latter His sending of His Son to accomplish this elective purpose; the former is a matter of God's eternal purpose, the latter, His execution of that purpose in history.

GOD'S ETERNAL COUNSEL—ELECTION

It is not the purpose of this study to present a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of election, but rather to present the essence of this biblical concept as seen in its relation to the doctrine of salvation. With this purpose in mind we shall briefly state three main views and then examine two key Scripture passages.

THREE MAJOR VIEWS

ARMINIAN

The *Arminian view* holds that God elects on the basis of foreseen faith. Henry C. Thiessen states the position clearly: "By election we mean that sovereign act of God in grace whereby He chose in Christ Jesus for salvation all those whom He foreknew would accept Him."[1]

1. Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 343.

Thiessen develops his argument as follows:

1. Election is a sovereign act of God in that He was under no obligation to elect anyone. All stand equally condemned before God because of sin, and therefore all could have been justly damned.

2. It was an act of grace in that He chose those who were utterly undeserving.

3. It was "in Christ"; He (the Father) chose in the merits of His Son.

4. He chose those whom He foreknew would believe. On this point appeal is made to Romans 8:29-30 and 1 Peter 1:1-2.

5. It is understood that God graciously grants to all men sufficient ability to accept Christ. "This is the salvation—bringing the grace of God that has appeared to all men. In His foreknowledge He perceives what each one will do with this restored ability, and elects men to salvation in harmony with His knowledge of their choice of Him."[2]

Arminian View of Election

Arminius, James. *The Writings of James Arminius.* Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956. Pages 380-81.

Carter, Charles W., ed. *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology.* 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.

Foster, Roger T., and V. Paul Marston. *God's Strategy in Human History.* Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1974.

BARTHIAN

According to the *Barthian view,* election is, primarily, the election of Jesus Christ; secondly, the election of the community; and, thirdly, the election of the individual. The first of these is most important for Barth's doctrine. The doctrine of reconciliation in Christ can be understood only in terms of the mystery of God's decisive word of election in Christ. Election in Christ is the miracle which God has worked among *all* men. This wonderful miracle is that Jesus Christ is *at the same time* the electing God and the elect man. While it is necessary to speak of a double predestination, this may be done only in terms of Golgatha. This elect man is also the rejected man, the one who endures the wrath of God to the end. There is no question here of a distribution of election and reprobation over such and such people but only of double predestination in and concerning Christ. Barth states, "In its simplest and most comprehensive form the dogma of predestination consists, then, in the assertion that the divine predestination is the election of Jesus

2. Ibid., 344.

Christ . . . Jesus Christ is the electing God, and . . . also elected man."[3]

Barth's radical revision of the Reformation view of election inevitably raises the question of whether his view does not require as a logical corollary the acceptance of a consistent universalism. Barth replies No! Berkouwer writes, however, "There is no alternative to concluding that Barth's refusal to accept the *apokatastasis* [universalism] cannot be harmonized with the fundamental structure of his doctrine of election."[4]

Henry Buis writes, "Since Barth says that all men are elect in Christ, that the basic difference between believers and unbelievers is only that the unbeliever doesn't know as yet that he is elected and that because Jesus took upon himself the rejection of man, no man is rejected, it is difficult to see how Barth can stop short of universalism."[5]

Barth's view of election makes evangelization an announcement of the sinner's acceptance in Christ rather than an invitation for him to repent; thus, in his sermons to prisoners he begins, "Dear brothers and sisters."

Barthian View of Election

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics.* Vol. 2,2. New York: Scribner's, 1957.

Berkouwer, Gerrit C. *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956.

Criterion, (Winter 1963), p. 11.

Maury, Pierre. *Predestination, and other Papers.* Richmond: Knox, 1960.

Torrance, T. F. "Predestination in Christ." *Evangelical Quarterly* 13 (1941): 108-31.

CALVINIST

The *Calvinistic view* states that God elects unconditionally; there is nothing in the creature which conditions His choice of some and passing over of others. Berkhof states the position clearly: Election is "that eternal 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

3. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1959, vol. 2: part 2, 103.
4. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 116. Emil Brunner concurs in this judgment (*Christian Doctrine of God,* Dogmatics, vol. 1 [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950], 346-53).
5. Harry Buis, *Historic Protestantism and Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presb. & Ref., 1958), 103.

to be the recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation."[6] Berkhof outlines the characteristics of election as follows:

1. It finds its moving cause in the sovereign will of God, His divine good pleasure.

2. It renders certain the salvation of those chosen in Christ (Rom. 8:29-30).

3. It is from eternity and is not to be confused with the idea of *temporal* selection (Eph. 1:4-5).

4. It is unconditional; it does not in any way depend upon the foreseen faith or good works of man. It rests exclusively upon the sovereign good pleasure of God who is also the giver of faith (Acts 13:48; Rom. 9:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:2).

5. It is irresistible. "This does not mean that man cannot oppose its execution to a certain degree, but it does mean that his opposition will not prevail. Neither does it mean that God in the execution of His decree overpowers the human will in a manner which is inconsistent with man's free agency. It does mean, however, that God can and does exert such an influence on the human spirit as to make it willing. Ps. 110:3; Phil. 2:13."[7]

Calvinistic View of Election

Berkouwer, G. C. *Divine Election.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960.

Boettner, Loraine. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination.* Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion.* 3:21-25. Philadelphia: Westminster, n.d.

Daane, James. *The Freedom of God: A Study of Election and the Pulpit.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

Johns, Kenneth. *Election: Love Before Time.* Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976.

Shedd, W. G. T. *Dogmatic Theology.* Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d. Pages 422 ff.

TWO KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

EPHESIANS 1:4-5

> 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. (Eph. 1:4-5, NASB)

6. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 114.
7. Ibid., 114-15.

This passage teaches us a number of important ideas.

1. The source of our election: "He [the Father] chose us."

2. The sphere of our election: "He [the Father] chose us in Him [Christ]." Reformation theology maintains that there is a decision of God which precedes this election in Christ; as we noted previously, Barth denies such. He maintains that we may not think of an independent decree of God as standing behind the revelation in Jesus Christ, but that in the most literal sense of the word we must view election exclusively in Jesus Christ. He is the electing God and the elected one.

3. The time of our election: "Before the foundation of the world." We have been the objects of God's eternal choice.

4. The purposes of our election: "That we should be holy and blameless." If Paul's reference here is to sanctification then we may conclude two things. First, holiness cannot be the ground of election. If men are chosen to be holy they cannot be chosen because they are holy. Second, holiness is the evidence of election. It is a contradiction in terms for one to claim to be elected unto holiness and to live in sin.

Another purpose of our election is adoption: "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons." The doctrine of adoption will be discussed later.

Also, God has foreordained us "to Himself." God's ultimate object in so predestinating us is His own glory.

5. The motive behind our election: "In love He predestined us." (There is some question of just how "love" is to be construed here, but the rendering of the NASB and RSV* seems preferable to that of the KJV.)

6. The basis of our election—"According to the kind intention of His will." Paul seems to teach here unconditional election. By unconditional it is meant that election is not conditioned by anything in the creature, nor does it in any way depend on anything in the creature whether foreseen faith or good works. It depends entirely on the sovereign good pleasure of God.

Commentaries on Ephesians

Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Ephesians.* Westwood, N. J.: Revell, 1961.

Hendricksen, William. *Exposition of Ephesians.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967.

Hodge, Charles. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950.

**Revised Standard Version.*