

The Doctrine of Salvation Zack Guess

Introduction

I have been requested by some good brethren to briefly write what I believe the Bible to teach about the doctrine of salvation, both in eternity and in time. I gladly comply with that request.

The reason for these requests is in regard to an article I wrote a number of years ago. Some seem to have concluded from this article that I believe all acts of faith, repentance, and obedience in the life of a regenerate child of God are unconditionally and irresistibly brought to pass by God in the same irresistible way that He accomplishes the work of regeneration. I do not believe this and never have. It was not my intention to convey such ideas in the article. God never exhorts anyone to be born again, but He does give many exhortations to a born again child of God.

Some have also objected to some broad generalizations I made in that article about some errors among some Primitive Baptists on the subject of time salvation. While I still believe the claims I made there are true of some, and they were certainly true of me in the early days of my ministry, I acknowledge that my charges may have been too sweeping and too severe. It is also true that my emphasis and terminology may differ to some degree from even those with whom I completely agree.

Eternal Salvation

Salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end and in between. Those who are given eternal life are completely passive in the reception of this life. This is necessarily so, because until the very instant they are given eternal life, they are **completely dead** in trespasses and in sins. They became this way in the first man, Adam. When he fell by transgression in the Garden of Eden, all his progeny fell in him. Since the time of Adam, every single human being, excepting the Virgin-born Lord Jesus Christ, has been born a sinner. This is the plain teaching of Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned...”

They do not possess spiritual life, until the Holy Spirit quickens them. Just as it is impossible for a person who is spiritually dead to perform **any action** in a physical way, so it is equally impossible for a person who is dead in sin, to perform **any action** in the spiritual realm. The Scriptures are replete with this simple but profound truth. Theologians and Bible students have been pleased to refer to as the doctrine of **TOTAL DEPRAVITY**. A few examples of texts that demonstrate this truth are as follows:

1 Cor. 2:14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: **neither can** he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” [It is impossible for one who is dead in trespasses and sins to know things

that are only spiritually discerned. This individual is missing the spiritual dimension. He is dead to the world of truly spiritual things.]

John 8:43, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye **cannot** hear my word.” [It is obvious that these individuals heard the audible words of the Lord Jesus. But they **could not** hear them spiritually.]

John 8:47, “He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.”

Romans 8:5, “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.”

The Doctrine of Eternal Election

If all mankind fell in Adam then how is it that anyone could ever have spiritual life and truly understand and embrace the things of God? Our eternal God planned before the world began how He would have His children eventually live with Him in glory forever. He **sovereignly chose** a vast number of individuals from the to-be-born human race and provided everything they would need for their salvation from the sinful condition He foresaw they would fall into in Adam’s transgression. This **sovereign choice** of individuals to salvation is known by theologians and Bible students as the doctrine of **UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION**. God did not choose every member of the human race for salvation. He allowed numbers of them to eternally perish in their sins. This choice of individuals to salvation did not depend on **anything** that God foresaw they would do. He made this very plain in speaking of Jacob and Esau. He said in Romans 9:11, “For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth...”

There are many Scriptures which **plainly and unmistakably** teach the man-humbling, God-exalting doctrine of eternal election. Some of them are:

Rom. 8:33, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.”

Eph. 1: 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 . . .”

Particular Redemption

Something more than election had to be done for God’s children. They were chosen to salvation, but that salvation had not yet been supplied. The fact that election was not enough by itself is because God is **infinitely just and holy**. He will not condemn the righteous and He will not clear the guilty. God is so Holy that He cannot look on sin with complacency. He demands **absolute perfection** for anyone to live in His presence eternally.

This is an impossible accomplishment for the human race, all of whom fell into sin in Adam. God would not just “sweep sin under the rug” and allow sinners into His presence. Clearly, something had to be done to remedy this situation.

God, in His infinite wisdom, devised the perfect remedy. He decreed that His eternal Son, God the Word, would go to the sin-cursed earth in the form of a human. God the Son, Who is co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father, would become incarnate, in taking a real human body and soul into union with His divinity. This is an indisputable Biblical fact, even though it is such a glorious and profound mystery that we are greatly limited in our ability to fully explain it. In writing about this wonderful mystery Paul said in 1 Tim. 3:16, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh. . .”

The purpose of the Word being made flesh was that He, as God’s **Substitute** for the elect, would bear the sins of all the elect, pay the price for them in satisfaction to God’s justice, and earn the perfect righteous for each of them that they would have to have to see and live with God in peace and fellowship.

Jesus Christ **redeemed** all the elect from their sins. All for whom He died as **Substitute** would not be seen as sinners by God because Christ bore their sins on the Cross of Calvary. Jesus Christ did **not** die for each member of the human race; He died only for all the elect. If He had died for each member of the human race, the entire race would have been cleansed of their sins. The Bible makes it very plain that this is not the case.

Theologians and Bible students have referred to this as the doctrine of **PARTICULAR REDEMPTION**. By this they mean that the effectual, successful redemption of Jesus Christ, which **never fails**, was not a general attempt at redemption for the entire human race, but was particular for the elect.

There are many, many Scriptures which teach this glorious truth. A very few are those which follow:

Matt. 1:21, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he **shall save** his people from their sins.”

Matt. 20:28, “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a **ransom** for many.”

1 Pet. 1:18, 19, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. . .”

Heb. 9:12. “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

Irresistible Grace

This wonderful salvation which was earned for each of the elect by Jesus Christ in His Person and Work must be personally applied to them sometime between their conception and death. God the Holy Spirit is the Person of the Holy Trinity Who does this. This is a **direct, immediate** work of the Holy Spirit. Contrary to what many Christians profess, the preached gospel has no part in this **impartation of spiritual life**. The Holy Spirit must work a miraculous work on those who are dead in sin before they can receive the gospel. The Holy Spirit performs this work as **Sovereign God**. He moves when He will and He is always successful in bringing spiritual life to those He intends to bring from death to life.

The Scriptures compare this work of the Holy Spirit to several things that are easy to be understood. One is a **creation**. The Lord miraculously created light on the first day of creation, and He did it without any cooperation or help from what He created. He simply said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He works the same way in the spiritual realm. Paul makes this **transparently plain** in 2 Cor 4:6, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The sinner who is to be given eternal life is just as **passive** in the initial reception of this life as the natural creation was when God spoke it into existence.

The reception of eternal life is also compared to a **birth**. Each of us will have to readily admit that we had **absolutely nothing** to do with our natural birth. We also had nothing to do with our spiritual birth. John 3: 8, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: **so is every one that is born of the Spirit**."

The receiving of spiritual life is also compared to a **resurrection**. Now, no rational persons would claim that they are going to be able to cooperate in their resurrection. No one will be able to successfully resist being resurrected. Lazarus had nothing to do with his resurrection. After he had life he could do something, but not before. The reception of spiritual life is compared to a resurrection in John 5:25, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."

God the Holy Spirit will make sure that each of the elect receives spiritual life sometime between **conception** and **death**. John the Baptist was born again while still in his mother's womb. (Luke 1: 41). One of the thieves who was crucified with Jesus Christ was cursing Him along with the other thief. However, while on the cross, the Holy Spirit brought to him the salvation earned by Jesus Christ and he completely changed. He asked the Lord to remember him when He entered His kingdom. (Lk. 23: 43).

Because the Holy Spirit is **always successful** when He brings salvation to an individual, and because He is so powerful He can never be successfully resisted, this doctrine has been called by theologians and Bible students the doctrine of **IRRESISTIBLE GRACE**.

Eternal Security

It takes the Sovereign God to bring salvation to an individual. It also takes that same God to keep that individual saved. If God just gave the gift of salvation to one and told him to either keep it or lose it, each person would inevitably lose that salvation. Our enemies are too great for us to overcome. Satan is a cunning and powerful enemy. The world we live in with all its false and seductive philosophies would overcome us. Our own sinful nature, which we will not get rid of until death, is probably our worst enemy.

Thankfully, God has guaranteed the complete salvation of each of His elect children. They can never lose their **relationship** with God as His dear children. They can and do sometimes break **fellowship** with God by their disobedience and lose the sense of His approving presence, but they cannot sever the tie of relationship. This is a comforting and strengthening truth.

This truth has been described in several ways by theologians and Bible students. Some call it eternal **security**. Others say, “**Once saved, always saved.**” Primitive Baptists and many others have commonly referred to this glorious truth by calling it the **Preservation of the Saints**. What this all means is that a child of God cannot lose his eternal salvation.

Many, many Scriptures **plainly teach** this truth, among which are:

Phil. 1:6, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath **begun** a good work in you **will perform** it until the day of Jesus Christ. . .”

10:27-30, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”

8:38, 39, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Primitive Baptists of past and present have also referred to this truth as the “doctrine of perseverance.” In some of our old literature, “perseverance” and “preservation” were used synonymously, but other of our writers used the word “perseverance” to include not only the idea of preservation but also of its manifestations and effects in the life of a child of God. The term “perseverance” has fallen into disfavor with many Primitive Baptists of the present, likely because of misunderstanding what our forefathers taught and because of the false concepts of it that have sometimes been taught by others. Nonetheless, I think nearly all Primitive Baptists continue to believe in a concept of perseverance. This is because there is a point to which a person exhibits such disobedience and infidelity that almost any Primitive Baptist would be moved from optimism to pessimism concerning that person’s spiritual life. This is particularly true

when the person turns to a resolute and perpetual disavowal of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though we leave the final judgment of any individual with the Lord, we feel confidently good about many, optimistic about others, and pessimistic about some. When we are turned from optimism to pessimism, it is because there are depths to which we do not typically expect a born-again child of God to go. There will naturally be differences in our expectations on questions of degree, and none of us can infallibly judge, but I think the general principle of perseverance is acknowledged by nearly all Primitive Baptists to some extent or another.

When an individual is born again, they are given a new spiritual nature that will forever endure. It will continue to be of consequence on their thoughts and behavior. This nature is such that a child of God cannot prosper in unbelief and sin. Though they may be sorely afflicted by either, they will be at a perpetual struggle against both. The wicked delight in sin and find it to be their meat and drink. Born-again children of God may eat and drink of it, but suffer when they do. The wicked delight in unbelief, and choose to be willfully ignorant of those many proofs of the Lord and His word. But God's regenerate children have been given a nature to believe. They are in despair when they do not believe, and really want to believe even when doubts and fears weigh hard against them.

Time Salvation

There are some Scriptures that mention salvation that are very obviously not talking about how a person is born again and saved eternally. Most Primitive Baptists have referred to these Scriptures as teaching a "time salvation." While the initial reception of eternal life is entirely unconditional, the blessings that a child of God enjoys while on earth are dependent to an important degree on his obedience to the commands of God. A few Scriptures which illustrate this are listed below:

Acts 2:40, "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation."

Acts 27:31, "Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."

I Tim. 2:15, "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety."

It is obvious that these and other Scriptures are not referring to how one is saved eternally. As has already been pointed out, eternal salvation is unconditional. This salvation is completely of the Lord from beginning to end. God never exhorted anyone to be born again. He just stated fact and said that "ye must be born again." God has never commanded a spiritually dead person to get spiritual life.

When a child of God is faithfully obedient to our Lord, the Lord will grant him peace, contentment and a sense of His presence. The child of God is then made to experience the temporal joy of his eternal salvation and of his fellowship with God. When a child of

God is disobedient and rebellious, God will chasten him and possibly withdraw these temporal blessings.

God never casts out one of His children, but He does chastise His children when they are disobedient. In fact, according to Hebrews 12, one of the signs of being a son of God is God's chastisement.

When many Primitive Baptists refer to "time salvation," they usually mean the temporal blessings of peace, contentment and sense of the Lord's presence that come from faithfully obeying Him. The chastisement of God or the withholding of blessings because of disobedience would be the loss of a portion of this "time salvation."

I certainly agree with this concept. An obedient child of God is going to enjoy much more of God's smiling countenance than one who is prone to disobey.

I do not believe that God's children are robots. God does not pick me up by the hair of the head and make me do things. While we are passive in things such as regeneration and resurrection, we are to an important degree active in our obedience. However, even in "time salvation" it is of the utmost importance that we give God proper respect and credit. We "work out our own salvation" only because it is God that works in us both "to will and to do" of His good pleasure. It is still true today what our Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples over 2000 years ago that "without Me ye can do **nothing**." (John 15: 5).

Avoiding Extremes

Sinful human beings are prone to extremes. We often overreact to what we consider to be error. On this matter of **perseverance** and **time salvation**, there are several extremes that we must labor to avoid. One extreme is that we may become too judgmental. We don't know the heart of any human being. We don't know for sure about anyone's prayer life. We can become so critical if people do not meet up to certain standards that we declare they are not born again. We do not know this for sure and should avoid making such judgments.

On the other extreme, we can so "water down" the teachings of the Scriptures that we dishonor God and cause hurt to His people. In their efforts to not be judgmental, some preachers are practically Universalists. They think that virtually everyone is a child of God no matter how they live or what they believe. In the most extreme cases, even those who reject Christ and lead habitually immoral lives are claimed to be merely lost in time but will be saved in eternity. While it is true that God's children oftentimes take on the ways of this world, the scriptures clearly teach that God's born-again children are profoundly different from the children of this world. Time salvation should never be perverted into a denial of the clear and repeated scriptural affirmations that habitual immorality and rejection of Christ are the marks of eternal damnation.

It is wrong to be too judgmental. However, it is also wrong to not demand repentance like John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, Peter, Paul, and all the early preachers did. It is very wrong

to give assurance of salvation to someone who is habitually and grossly disobedient to the commands of Christ.

We need to encourage God's children to look for evidences of their salvation. Paul said that one very important evidence of whether or not one was of the elect was in how he responded to the gospel (1 Thess. 1: 4, 5). In 1 John the apostle said that evidences of being born again included **obedience to the commands of Christ, love of the Lord and His children, and belief that Jesus is the Christ.**

In the Sermon on the Mount in the Beatitudes, the Lord Jesus had all kinds of evidence, such as being poor in spirit and in hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Paul talked of the fruit of the Spirit [you know a tree by its fruits] in Galatians 5: 22,23.

To be faithful to God we must preach with the Scriptural balance. May God bless us in our endeavors to do so. May we not be men-pleasers who are more afraid of what men may say or do than we are in pleasing our Lord.