

January 29, 2017

Ephesians 1:3-10 / II Timothy 1:8-12 / Romans 8:29-30

The Order of Salvation (#2): Justification, Sanctification, Glorification

Last week, because of time constraints, we could only look at the first three of the six things God does in bringing anyone to partake of the benefits of salvation in Christ. And as we did, we saw Paul essentially telling us that if we've truly been born of the Spirit, and have come to faith in Christ, it's because God foreknew (or fore-loved) us, and predestined us, and eventually – *at that special and divinely chosen moment in our lives* – called us.

And each one of those *DIVINE SAVING ACTIONS* we looked at are part of God's soul-humbling, heart-stopping, joy-producing, explanation-defying grace. For who, in their right mind, could ever even begin to understand why they – *sinner that they are* – were fore-loved and graciously chosen to be partakers of the redemptive benefits and salvific blessings of a holy and righteous God.

As I mentioned to someone just this past week – that's the biggest struggle I have with this truth. *NOT* any disagreement over the fact that this is the way God works, but rather, "why me?" There's so many people who are so much wiser and kinder and more loving and compassionate than I will ever be. People who have sinned less, are better people and husbands and fathers and contributors to their community – yet they die without **EVER PARTAKING** of the grace of salvation and go into a Christless eternity.

And then there's me. I ran and rebelled and got into things I can't even mention from the pulpit, yet God plucked me from the fire (to use a phrase from John Wesley). No matter how fast I ran or how much I rebelled, I couldn't shake the sense that God was in hot pursuit, He had my number, and He was chasing me down.

It's one of the reasons I so love the famous poem by Francis Thompson (written in around 1890) called, "The Hound of Heaven." He was raised in a devout religious home, attended seminary, and then medical school, where he unfortunately became addicted to the then legally attainable drug called opium (which anyone could easily pick up at their local pharmacy).

Yet although he was an opium addict from 18 on, wrestling with continual lapses, and attempted suicides, and living in destitution, he could not shake the sense of God's love for him. A God who would not abandon, but relentlessly pursued, even one of His most wayward of children.

A God who sought out His wandering lamb, regardless of what he had done, or how far he had fallen. It's an amazing poem about God's love-fueled determination to lay hold of, and never let go of, one of His chosen.

Charles Spurgeon speaks of the same thing where in head-scratching wonder he says: *"I believe in the doctrine of election because I am quite certain that if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him. And I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards. And He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I could never find any reason in myself as to why He should have looked upon me with special love."*

It's his expression of that ever-pressing question in the hearts of all who discover themselves to be one of His elect: "Why, of all people, am I an object of His special love and grace?" What believer, knowing themselves as they do, has not asked that very thing – since we know it was NOT because of anything worthy or deserving in us?

But that's not all God does. There are **THREE MORE SAVING ACTIONS** God carries out on behalf of His fore-loved ones.

For once He calls them – He then **JUSTIFIES** them, and **SANCTIFIES** them (or as Paul puts it in v. 29, “conforms them to the image of His Son,” which is simply another way to describe sanctification), and will at last eventually **GLORIFY** them (thereby completing the process of salvaging of the sinner from their fallen state).

So, let’s continue by looking at the **FOURTH** gracious act God carries out in the process of saving those He foreknows, pre-destines, and calls: He **JUSTIFIES** them. That is, He credits or applies to their personal account all the saving merits of Jesus’ life of obedience, and His death for sin.

Since Paul tells us here in v. 30 that, “Those [God] called He also justified...” we **KNOW** that somehow, in the mystery of grace, that “divine inner calling” which every believer at some point receives, brings to that called person the gift of faith, making it possible for them to believe in the Lord Jesus. We saw this last week when we looked at both Acts 13:48 and Acts 16:14.

Even the well-known verses of Eph. 2:8-9 also speak of it, where Paul writes: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith – and this (that is, this faith) is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works lest any man should boast.”*

So, in the inner and effectual call which God extends to His fore-loved and predestined ones, He not only changes the sinner’s heart, but in doing so, enables it to believe. *“The LORD,”* as Luke says, *“opened [Lydia’s] heart to believe.”* Not every woman sitting there, but Lydia’s alone (at least on this particular occasion) doing what only He as God, can, and must do.

As the Gospel is shared, or preached, or read, or proclaimed, the Holy Spirit goes forth with it, to open certain hearts -- and as He does, He also brings the ability to believe. That's why Scripture calls faith a "gift."

Yet it's not a gift because God somehow does the believing for us, but because in the divine grace of calling us: God raises us from our death in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1 & 5 / Col. 2:13), opens our blind eyes to see (I Cor. 2:6-10), gives us a heart of flesh to replace our heart of stone (Ez. 36:26), convinces us in our hearts of the truth about Jesus (Acts 16:14) – and we find ourselves believing, whereas minutes, or even seconds beforehand, we didn't!

In the flash of an instant we find ourselves believing, and the moment we believe – God *JUSTIFIES us!* That is, He chooses to view us, "Just-as-if-we'd-never-sinned." He takes (as He promises in Rom. 3 and 4) and credits or reckons to us the righteousness of Jesus – choosing to look at us from that moment on as if Jesus' obedience was our obedience, and as if in Jesus' death we ourselves had already died to pay the penalty for all our sins!

In **JUSTIFICATION** God chooses to look at me in a way I don't at all deserve: As if I myself had obeyed and suffered like Jesus obeyed and suffered! That is "justification!" God crediting to our own personal account, the sin-atoning, disobedience-forgiving, guilt-erasing, and righteousness-satisfying merits of Jesus' law-fulfilling life and sin-pardoning death!

Although we are imperfect, He chooses – **for Jesus sake** – to view us as Christ is, instead of how we truly are! He chooses to gaze upon the radiant robe of Jesus perfect righteousness covering us, and not peer underneath it to see the stains of sin and imperfection that lie underneath it.

Though we fail, He will not cast us off, and though we stumble, He will set us on our feet again! Though we mess up He will not give up on us, and even if we wander into the forbidden lands of temptation and sin, He will NEVER abandon us to that sin, but relentlessly pursue us – *even to the gates of death and beyond!*

That's the beauty of being JUSTIFIED. He views us as perfect even though we're not even close! He welcomes us daily to the throne of grace, and grants us full pardon – *not as something we must earn* – but as something we don't deserve, but cannot lose!

Which brings us to the next thing God does -- He **SANCTIFIES** us. It's the **FIFTH** saving action God performs in the lives of His chosen ones. He grows them in godliness “through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit” (II Thess. 2:13/ I Pet. 1:2).

As I already pointed out, the word “sanctify” does not appear in either verse. But the description of it appears in v. 29 where Paul tells us that God, “predestined us to be CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, that we might be the firstborn among many brothers” (or as it could be translated, “the first of many brothers to be born”). And it means, “born again,” or “born of the Spirit.”

And here I do need to tell you there are those people (and you may run into them), who seek to get around the fact that God predestines people to salvation, by saying: *“No, He doesn't predestine them to salvation, He only predestines them to be sanctified.”*

Paul speaks the same way in Eph. 1:4, where he tells us: “God chose (or elected) us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in Him (or in Christ).”

So, the argument goes, **WE** choose Jesus of our own free will, and once we do, then we discover **HE** has predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus. So, being saved is our choice, it's our being sanctified that God ensures or guarantees through the grace of predestination, after we choose Him (that's how the argument goes).

Yet that argument really doesn't really hold water. Because as we see in Eph. 1:5 (the very next verse in that text) Paul continues on to say, *"In love He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Christ Jesus..."* And adoption is a saving act. It's another word for the salvation experience – *the relational and familial word for it* – whereby we are brought by grace to belong to God as Father and be joined as a newly adopted child to His family.

The same is also inferred here in 8:29. Because Paul goes on to tell us that this predestination unto sanctification is so that we might be, *"the first to be born (or born again) among many brothers and sisters."*

So why does Paul phrase it this way? Because he wants us to know that predestination has a higher end in mind than simply ensuring that certain people will go to heaven – as some DO falsely believe.

This is Paul's way of assuring us that God's intent in saving us includes the all-important element of restoring in us the divine image that was lost in the Fall! We were made in the image of God, but that image has been so distorted by sin that it's often hard to recognize. People often do things that bear no resemblance at all to anything that anyone could call God-like or Christlike!

So, God's purpose is not simply to "save us" (in the "take us to heaven" sense), it's to restore that broken and fallen image of God in us until it recovers its original radiance and beauty! An image that is seen most fully in Jesus! To fully reflect the image of God, we would need to be

completely like Jesus – who is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15).

As Paul says in II Cor. 4:4: “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the glory of Christ, who IS the image of God.” / “For in Christ,” as he says again in Col. 2:9, “all the fullness of the Godhead (or the Deity) lives in bodily form.”

And he’s not talking about Jesus’ outward appearance. The people in the 1960-70’s who tried to look like Jesus (walking around with long hair, a beard, and a white robe (trying to conform their outward appearance to what they thought He may have looked like) missed the point! Because the “image of God” in Christ, consisted in the holiness, righteousness, goodness, love, compassion, zeal for God’s glory. The beauty of His inner person!

That’s why God is so intent to conform us to the likeness of Christ! Because in becoming more like Him, the divine image that was so damaged and marred and distorted in the Fall, is restored in us in the way He always intended it to be – to reflect the radiance of God’s glory!

That’s what Paul wants us to know by phrasing it this way! That the goal behind our predestination unto salvation is not simply to guarantee certain people heaven, but to assure them that His goal for them is that they would gradually come to recover more and more, the radiance and beauty of the glory of His image that was lost when man fell into sin.

That’s why the moment He calls us, and justifies us, he also sanctifies us – a process throughout our entire lives. And here it is important to point out the often-overlooked truth that sanctification in the Bible is BOTH a once done thing, and a progressive thing (though most people I know focus only on the progressive part).

In fact, in the NT sanctification as a once done thing is spoken of just as much as sanctification as a process. So in I Cor. 6:11 we read (speaking to relatively new believers): *“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified...”* Each word refers to a once done past event. You were washed, and you were sanctified, NOT *“you are being sanctified.”*

Likewise, in Acts 20:32 we read: *“And now I commend you to God and the message of His grace, a message that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among those who are sanctified.”* Or literally from the Greek – those *“having BEEN sanctified”* – a past done action. The same is true in Acts 26:18.

And this makes all the difference! Because what this tells us is that when the Holy Spirit comes into us at the moment of new birth, what he does is “sanctify us” or “set us apart as holy” (that is, as one who now belongs or is consecrated to God). He makes us “a new creation in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17).

In fact, listen to what Paul says there in II Cor. 5:17: *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”* Notice he does not say, *“The old is going and the new is coming.”*

No! What he is speaking about is something that took place, NOT something that is in the process of taking place!

So, what the Holy Spirit does when He enters into us at the time of the new birth is set us apart as belonging to God, and stamp afresh the stamp of the image of God on our soul. And again, what difference it makes to know that! Because that means that as I grow (or go through the process of sanctification which the Bible does speak of in I Thess. 4:3 and 5:23) I am NOT seeking to become what I am not, but rather, what God in the new birth has graciously made me to be!

I've shared this before, but I don't know any better way to express it. It's like that old cartoon, "The Road Runner." He takes off running in a flash! PSSSH – he's gone! But what happens? His shadow is left behind, and then has to catch up to him! Well that's what happens to us in the new birth. We are made new creatures in an instant! The old is gone and the new has come – *snap* – in the flash of an instant!

But then we spend the rest of our life catching up to what God has made us to be! Or look at it this way. In the new birth it's like God takes a big hypodermic needle, filled with the sin-killing serum of holiness, and injects it into our heart (or our blood stream) totally altering our nature and making us a new creation in Christ. We immediately become infected with holiness!

Yet, it takes an entire life time for that serum to find its way to every distant part of our body and soul. In fact, we eventually die without it ever having reached every crack and crevice of our body and soul.

But that's ok! You know why? Because God has predestined that we WILL be conformed to the image of His Son! Although Paul reminds us, that will not take place in all it's glorious fullness until we are *GLORIFIED*.

And notice the word "GLORIFIED" is in the past tense as well – *which made sense with all the other verbs or divinely performed actions* – writing as he was to a church full of foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and sanctified (or washed and set apart) believers. But it leaves us confused in relation to glorification, because without exception, glorification has to do with the consummation of our salvation after death. It refers to what happens when we are freed of all sin, and clothed with immortality at the resurrection of the dead.

So how then can Paul say that “Those God justified He also glorified” (past tense)? I believe Augustine offers the best answer when he says, *“Even though believers have not yet experienced glorification, God has already determined that they will. He will not leave the process of redemption unfinished, but will as Paul says, ‘carry it onto completion’ (Phil. 1:6).”*

It’s God’s predetermined plan for His elect, and thus it’s such a guaranteed thing that Paul can speak of it as surely as if it had already happened! God’s foreknown, predestined, called, justified and sanctified ones – **WILL** *infallibly be glorified!*

That’s why “predestination” is such a reason for praise! It breeds hope, and assurance, and comfort, and joy! It breeds confidence, strengthens faith, offers consolation, nurtures peace, restores rest to the soul and spawns a greater love for God!

Embrace it and that’s what it will do for you!