

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

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§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 1

Doctrine of Election from a Calvinist Perspective

Today we begin a new locus, or section, in our survey of Christian doctrine. You may remember back when we began that I said we would be looking at the various *loci communes* of Protestant theology. These were the so-called common places or chief themes of systematic theology. In our survey we've looked at things like Doctrine of Revelation, the Doctrine of God, Doctrine of Christ, Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Doctrine of Creation, the Doctrine of Man, and now at long last we come to a new locus which is the Doctrine of Salvation. This locus lies at the very heart of the Gospel because it will address the problem that we've been discussing; namely, sin and guilt before a holy and righteous God, and how God has chosen to deal with it so as to bring about our salvation.

Election

Calvinism

As with every aspect of Christian doctrine, the Doctrine of Salvation is also a matter of controversy. So we want to begin by looking at the doctrine of election from first a Calvinist point of view and then an Arminian point of view. I am not going to be looking at the original views of John Calvin and Jacob Arminius. This isn't an attempt to do historical theology, but rather what passes under their names as the theology done in a Calvinist mode versus an Arminian mode. What we will do is look at a couple of key New Testament passages from a Calvinistic perspective and then also from an Arminian perspective and see the difference in the way that these two schools of thought interpret these key passages.

Interpretation of Ephesians 1:4-5

Let's begin with the doctrine of election from a Calvinist point of view. I would invite you to turn to Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, chapter one. We'll just read verses three to six. Ephesians 1:3-6, Paul writes,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Let's break down the process of salvation or election as here described.

The source of our election is God the Father. In verse 3, he speaks of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is he who has chosen us. So election has its source in God the Father. He is the one who chooses those to be saved.

The sphere in which this election takes place is Christ. Paul says in verse 4, "he chose us

in him,” that is, in Christ. So election is something that takes place “in Christ.” We are elect insofar as we are in him.

When did this election take place? Well, Paul says he chose us in him “before the foundation of the world.” So before God ever created the universe, as is described in Genesis 1:1, he had already chosen us to be holy and blameless before him to be his children through Jesus Christ.¹ So from past eternity this decision has already been made. It is not something lately arrived upon by God the Father, but it is an eternal decision that precedes the very foundations of the world, the creation of the universe.

What is the purpose of this election? Paul says it is “that we should be holy and blameless before him,” and also that we should be adopted as his children. He says in verse 5 to be “his sons through Jesus Christ.” Finally, it is for his glory (in verse 6) “to the praise of his glorious grace.” So the purpose of this election is that we might be holy and blameless before God, adopted as his children, to the praise of God’s glory.

What is the motive? Why did God do this? What purpose did he have in doing this? Well, the motive is love. Paul says that he “destined us in love” to be his sons through Jesus Christ. So election is something that is motivated by God’s love and that leads him to elect and save persons.

Finally, what is the basis of God’s election? It is simply his will. Notice that Paul says he destined us in love “according to the purpose of his will.” It is simply God’s choice to elect whom he wishes. It is according to his own free will. Therefore, election is unconditional. It is not something that we can merit. It is not something that we can bring about through our actions. This is a decision that was unconditionally made by God according to his will prior to the foundations of the universe, before we ever existed. So this is an unconditional election. Notice what Paul says in verses 11-12 of Ephesians 1, “In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.” So he says, again, that this is simply according to God’s purpose. The one who accomplishes all things according to the council of his will. So that is the ultimate basis for election – simply, God’s sovereign free choice to elect those whom he chooses to salvation.

Interpretation of Romans 8:28-30

Now let’s turn over to Paul’s letter to the Romans 8:28-30. Here Paul says,

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Notice according to this passage it says that God’s predestination is according to his foreknowledge. In verse 29, “those whom he foreknew” he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

¹ 5:02

Now, non-Calvinists will sometimes say that this shows that God looks into the future, so to speak, and sees the free decision of those who would believe in Christ and seeing how they would freely decide he then predestines them. But notice that that view of predestination makes predestination a sort of fifth wheel – it doesn't really do anything. He looks into the future, sees that these people will believe in Christ, and if they will believe in Christ then there is no need for predestination.² They will believe in him! So predestination on this view doesn't do anything. Foreknowledge of free decisions tells God what is going to happen, and predestination or foreordination becomes a sort of superfluous exercise on God's part.

So that doesn't seem to be what is involved in God's sovereign election of certain persons. Rather, foreknowledge should be understood in a different way according to the Calvinist. If what God does foresee is people's faith, the Calvinist will say that faith itself is a sovereign gift of God. God sees that he will bestow saving faith on certain persons so what he sees is in effect his own act of bestowing or giving saving faith to those whom he has chosen. So, for example, let's look at some scriptural passages in support of this view.

John 3:3-8. This is Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus,

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."

This is something of a pun because the word for "wind" is the same as the word for "spirit." Jesus says the wind blows where ever it wills; you can't control the wind. You don't know where it comes from; you don't know where it's going. Similarly, he says it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. The Spirit blows upon whom he wills in order to bring regeneration and new life.

Turn over to John 6:44-45, Jesus says,

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.

Here Jesus ascribes this drawing power of God the Father upon people to bring them to Christ. Apart from this work of God the Father, people will not come to Christ. But if he does draw them, then they will come assuredly to saving faith in Christ.

Look at verse 65 of that same chapter. Jesus said, "This is why I told you no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." If God the Father grants that someone should come to Christ, he assuredly will; but on the other hand, if it is not granted to someone to come to Christ by the Father, then that person cannot come to Christ. The

² 10:06

sovereign decision lies with God the Father.

Look at Paul's letter to the Ephesians 2:8. Here Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God." So this salvation is not something that you work of yourself. This is from God. He is the one who works it out. That is why there is no boasting Paul goes on to say in verse 9.

Finally, 1 Peter 1:2, speaking to the exiles of the dispersion in various places in Asia Minor, "chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood." Here all of the persons of the Trinity are involved.³ It is God the Father who chooses and destines certain persons. It is the Spirit of God who sanctifies them for obedience to Jesus Christ.

So, going back to Romans 8:28, if it is true that God looks into the future and sees peoples' faith in Christ and predestines them on that basis, nevertheless, this faith is itself not a human work. It is not something that any natural person can generate. This is itself the result of God's effectual work in that person.

Besides that – and this is a very characteristic emphasis of Calvinism – foreknowledge doesn't really mean "to know something in advance," as though God looks into the future and finds out what is going to happen. Rather, "foreknew" is a way of saying God loved them in advance. To say he foreknew them meant he foreloved them. He picks out certain persons in the future on whom he will set his love. So foreknowledge is in effect to choose certain persons upon whom he will set his love. It doesn't mean a certain passive acquisition of knowledge; this is an active bestowal of favor and love upon those persons whom he picks out.

Let's look at a couple of passages where knowledge is used in this way.

Genesis 18:19. Here God is talking about Abraham and God says in verse 19,

. . . I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

You'll notice that in the translation I read, the verse is rendered "I have chosen him" but the word in the Hebrew means "I have known him." So the knowing of Abraham – when it says "I knew Abraham" – it doesn't just mean "Yeah, I know this guy." It means "I favored him. I loved Abraham. I picked him out. I chose Abraham." Knowledge here is a much richer concept than just the acquisition of information.

Let's look at a couple of other passages that illustrate this usage. Psalm 1:6 says, "for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." This means much more than God is just aware of or informed about the way of the righteous. Because in that same sense, he knows the way of the wicked, right? He is not uninformed about what the wicked do. So if this is to distinguish God's knowledge of the way of the righteous from his knowledge of the way of the wicked, this means that God favors the way of the righteous. He somehow bestows approval and personal commitment to the way of the righteous. There is much more here than just the passive acquisition of information about the way of the righteous.

³ 15:26

Finally, Jeremiah 1:5. This is a passage about the call of Jeremiah. Look what God says to Jeremiah in verse 5 of chapter 1. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Before Jeremiah was even conceived, before he ever existed, God says “I knew you.”⁴ That doesn’t, again, mean just that God had information about him. That is evident from the remainder of the verse: “Before you were born, I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet.”

So when Romans 8:28 says, “Those whom he foreknew, he also predestined” that means those whom God loved in advance, those whom he had picked out on whom to bestow his favor and his grace. Those persons he predestined. So to interpret Romans 8:28 merely in terms of just foreknowledge without this sovereign bestowal of God’s love and approval is to have a very, very thin concept of foreknowledge in particularly of this verse.

Charles Horn, who is a Reformed theologian, points out that in Romans 8:28-30 we have here a description of God’s eternal counsel, what he does in eternity before the foundations of the world. Then we find its actualization of this counsel in the human affairs of life. So, he would say in God’s eternal counsel we have first God foreknew whom he would save. That means those whom he foreloved. Second, there is then God’s predestination. Those whom he foreknew or foreloved, he then predestined. That is to say, he ordained them to salvation. This is God’s eternal counsel. From before the foundations of the world God foreknew and predestined certain persons to salvation.

Then in verses 29-30, you have the actualization of this eternal counsel described. First comes calling. Paul says those whom he predestined, he called. At some time in your life, if you are elect, if you have been predestined by God, he will then reach out and he will call you to bring you to himself. This calling notice is effectual calling. This is not some sort of, again, passive invitation. This is God reaching out effectually and grabbing you and bringing you in. It is what Jesus described as God the Father’s drawing these persons to himself. This is the doctrine of effectual calling. Then comes justification. Those whom he called, he also justified. This is by faith which is not something that the unregenerate man can muster on his own being spiritually dead and separated from God. This is something that God must bestow upon you. So by faith, then, God will justify those whom he has effectually called. The final step in salvation is glorification. Those whom he justified, he also glorified and this is certainly, surely. This gives you assurance of salvation.

This has been called the unbroken chain in God’s process of salvation. Those whom he foreknew, he predestined. Those he predestined, he called. Those whom he called, he justified. Those whom he justified, he glorified. There is nowhere along the line that someone can drop out of this chain and fail to obtain salvation because it is the work of God throughout. His declaration or choice sovereignly in eternity before the foundations of the world, then in human history its actualization as he effectually calls, justifies, and then finally glorifies those whom he has predestined.⁵

⁴ 20:12

⁵ 25:12

DISCUSSION

Question: I really enjoyed and appreciated your lesson last week. It was the first time the subject of election had sort of clicked and it sort of made sense to me. As I understood it, it was all about more of a group election. The group he elects is the group that has faith in Christ, right? Everything you are talking about today seems to be about individual election. Can you reconcile those two things or is it the fact that they are two separate viewpoints?

Answer: First we want to create the tension before we do the reconciliation. I've done my best to explicate the Calvinist view faithfully and as persuasively as I can. But the other view that you are talking about is more the Arminian view and we will look at that next. Then we will try to understand how we can understand these passages – who has the right view, if either. But at first I want to lay out these opposing points of view. You are quite right in seeing the Calvinist interpretation as being very different from what we talked about last week.

Question: It seems to me, speaking of the same tension, it appears that John 3:16 “whosoever shall believe in him.” That would be like saying really the way to interpret this is “whosoever that God foreknew.” If you are one of those elect, then if you can believe in him – that seems direct tension; very opposite.

Answer: You are quite right in saying that that is the way the Calvinist would take a passage like John 3:16, “Whosoever believeth in him should not perish.” Well, that could really be phrased, “Whosoever God has picked out and chosen to bestow his saving grace upon will not perish,” etc. So yeah, that is quite right.

Question: I am having a little bit of a problem with this idea of being foreknown is the same as being foreloved. What about those he didn't choose? That leaves you with the concept that he didn't love them. That goes again John 3:16 and many other passages. There is no question in my mind that those he chose, he loved, but . . .

Answer: The Calvinist here, it seems to me, has to maintain that God doesn't love all people equally. He has a very special love for the elect. He loves all people in general and all of us are equally sinful and condemned before God. But there is this elect group that he has a special love for. In the same way that he specially picked out Israel in the Old Testament, so he specially picks out certain persons to save through Christ and he passes over the others. You will remember Abraham was called a friend of God. There was a special relationship there. Although the Calvinist might want to try to soften this in some way, it seems to me that the fact that salvation is not universal simply requires the Calvinist to say that God does not love everybody in the same way. That doesn't mean that his love is conditional. Quite the opposite, in fact. Because it is God who chooses on whom to set his love, it is utterly sovereign. God just looks at the mass of humanity and without any merit on their own, or any differentiating factors, he just picks out those whom he wants to save and he passes over the rest. So that does seem to be the implication of this view.

Question: For what it's worth, I think you have given a very fair overview of Calvinism. I had a question about something you said when we were talking about it earlier. You were

talking about the interpretation of Ephesians 1:4-5. You say the source is the Father but the sphere is Christ. I'm trying to understand that. It is my understanding that in the economy of redemption, Christ is subordinate to the Father because he was sent to come to the earth. He is not subordinate as a member of the Trinity but only in the economy of redemption.⁶ There was something called the *pactum salutis* where there was an agreement between Christ and the Father before the creation of the world where the elect would be saved.

Answer: All right, now how do you see that as incompatible with what I've said?

Followup: Why do you say that Christ is the sphere? I don't understand that.

Answer: Wouldn't that be the result of this pact that you described between the Father and the Son? That it will be through the death and redemption wrought in Christ that election will come. So people are not elect apart of Christ. It is in Christ that they are elect before God the Father. So it isn't something that God the Father does apart from the second person. He elects them in Christ. That is how I would understand it.

Followup: If you look at the high priestly prayer, it almost seems like . . . in verse 17:6 it says that the Father gives them to the Son and it seems the Son through his substitutionary atonement gives them back to the Father.

Answer: Yes, and eventually Paul talks about how even the Son himself will become subordinate to the Father. You are drawing our memories back to the Doctrine of the Trinity where I believe we distinguished between the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity. The ontological Trinity is the three persons of the Trinity considered in and of themselves apart from the work of salvation. And in and of themselves they are all equal – there is no subordination. They are equally omnipotent, omniscience, morally perfect, and the rest. But the economic Trinity would be the subordination of the Son to the Father for the sake of salvation. Then the Spirit will come at the bidding of the Son to carry on his work after the Son is sent. So there is this kind of economic Trinity that involves a kind of subordination for the sake of salvation. But that doesn't mean there is any kind of inferiority among the persons of the Trinity.

Question: Coming from a Presbyterian background . . .

Answer: Yes, and that would be a Calvinistic denomination.

Followup: In one way, I would like you to comment on an interpretation that would mean, or would say, that God has a plan, a plan that will ultimately result in his glorification, and that even he did not call Satan to rebel. That may have been part of this plan as the plan necessitated man rebelling, man being redeemed, and in that sense as all angels aren't ultimately in union and glorifying God as in Satan and the demons, not all men will therefore participate in the ultimate eternal glory, not so much that in the sense of I am going to choose you and I'm not going to choose you. It is more of working out his plan, and therefore God is God, God is perfect in his justification or in his plan. It's perfection. I don't . . . I guess there is something that creates the tension as in "He chose you but he didn't choose me." So what is this . . . I've always thought of it more as total omnipotent and just that we have free will and we utilize that free will and he gives grace

⁶ 30:09

to whom he gives grace based on the plan he is working out.

Answer: All right, let's look at this from the Calvinistic point of view. You are quite right to emphasize God's plan.⁷ In Ephesians 1, he talks about how God is accomplishing all things according to the counsel of his will. He says that God is achieving the purpose of his will. That is his plan. So he has a plan. And you are quite right in drawing our attention to the fact that it says that it is to the praise of his glorious grace. So this is a plan that will redound in glory to God. You will often find Calvinists and Reformed teachers emphasizing very, very strongly the glory of God. The ultimate end is to bring glory to God. So they would say that choosing to save some but not all more effectively brings greater glory to God than if he saved all. Sometimes they will say that the punishment of the damned glorifies God's justice and holiness because it shows his righteousness and justness in condemning those who deserve it. And we all deserve it. So this is just punishment rightly deserved. But the fact that he would also save some shows how merciful he is and gracious he is to save anybody because nobody deserves it. So rather than having universal salvation, I think they would want to say that in some mysterious way, having less than universal salvation redounds to God's greater glory.

Followup: I want to emphasize, too, that the creature mankind was also given free will.

Answer: That is not really part of this picture, though.

Followup: No, but I see it as part of our nature. It seems to me if I am loved by someone who is free to choose not to love me or to love me, then that is a dearer love than someone who must love me. They are not choosing out of their heart to love me. They are being, because of who they are, they must love me.

Answer: Yes, I think now you are beginning to express more the Arminian point of view whereas on this view the natural man, especially as I say fallen corrupted man, sinful man, has no disposition to love God at all. He is an enemy of God. He hates God. He loves darkness rather than light. He doesn't understand spiritual things. So it is God who must pick out this person out of his love and then call him and regenerate him. That will then produce in the justified person a genuine love for God. But this would be the result of God's actions. So this view, as we said last time, affirms human freedom only in a compatibilistic sense. You remember what that was. That is a view of freedom that says freedom is compatible with being determined. Even though you are causally determined to do something, you still do it freely. That is a different view of freedom than the Arminian has which would be that genuine, real freedom is incompatible with being causally determined to do what you do.

Question: Don't you think this is more like Dortism than Calvinism?

Answer: Dortism?

Followup: Yeah, from the Council of Dort. Because what they thought of at Dort versus what John Calvin thought of.

Answer: All right. I said that I am not doing a historical analysis of Calvin and Arminius' view but of the movements that followed them. But having said that, I have heard people say this – that Calvin wasn't really a Calvinist. But at least in my reading the *Institutes*

⁷ 35:00

and in my Calvin class that I had with a good Reformed theologian, I think Calvin was a Calvinist.

Followup: All the way? Even Romans?

Answer: Yeah, I do. It seems to me that he believed that everything was determined by God and predestined and it was ultimately God who does it. Be that as it may, I recognize that some have said this. In all candor, it sure looked to me like Calvin was a Calvinist.

[someone off-mic mentions "The Five Points of Calvin"]

Followup: Yeah, I was just wondering, is he a TULIP guy?

Answer: Yes, we haven't talked about all of those points in this class.⁸ We haven't looked at that. We looked at the doctrine of sin, total depravity, now we are coming to unconditional election.

Question: This is kind of a triviality. It says that "he glorified and justified." Doesn't that seem sort of hard? Normally, glorification is sort of after you die and you go to heaven. It says, "Those he foreknew he also predestined, those he marked out in advance are predestined and those he called he justified and those he justified he glorified."

Answer: What are you reading from?

Followup: This is N. T. Wright's translation of Romans 8. I assume it is a decent translation. He knows his Greek well. I am just wondering why is it in this sort of past tense – justified and glorified.

Answer: I take it that glorification in this passage is referring to beyond death. This isn't something that takes place in life. We are justified and we are making our way toward our heavenly reward. It will be those whom he justified he glorified in the sense that they will inherit the Kingdom of God and eternal life. But certainly Paul doesn't think that glorification comes prior to the resurrection, right? When you read 1 Corinthians 15 it is the resurrection body that is going to be our glorified, spiritual, powerful, immortal, incorruptible body. I don't think Paul could think that we are glorified in this earthly existence.

Followup: I just wondered if the past tense has any implications because all of these are exactly in the past tense: he foreknew, and he predestined (past tense) and he glorified (past tense).

Answer: Sometimes people will say being in past tense shows its certainty. It is though it is done that this is going to happen. There is no falling away from salvation for the elect. It is done. It is a done deal.

Followup: OK, sort of a New Testament version of the prophetic perfect that we find in the Old Testament.

Answer: Yeah.

I think with that we will close today. But next time we will take up the Calvinist

⁸ 40:01

viewpoint of calling and regeneration.⁹

⁹ Total Running Time: 42:37 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 2

Calvinist Perspective on Calling and Regeneration

We've been talking about the Doctrine of Salvation and looking at a couple of key New Testament passages, first from a Reformed or Calvinistic point of view and then we'll look at them from an Arminian point of view. Last time we looked at Ephesians 1:3-6 and Romans 8:28-30 from a Calvinistic perspective.

DISCUSSION

Question: I was actually reading your arguments versus the Calvinistic arguments regarding “the people God foreknew, he predestined.” From the church fathers, it looks like they interpret “foreknew” as actually knowing in advance. Even John Chrysostom, the Eastern Orthodox father. There are two instances where foreknowledge – *proginosko* – is sort of like loving in advance. Then there are two other instances, I think in 2 Peter, one is in Acts definitely, and I think in a non-Pauline epistle where foreknowledge means knowing, the way “I know mathematics.” So it can go either way. Chrysostom, and all the church fathers, have said that God’s predestination of us being justified, sanctified, glorified, is based on his knowledge that we would respond to his offer of grace.

Answer: Really?

Followup: Yeah. In fact even Chrysostom said this whole idea of what Pelagius and Augustine sort of like battled against, the idea of what is man’s soul capable of apart from grace. Chrysostom didn’t even think there was such a state of the soul. It is like asking if pigs could fly would bacon taste different. There is no human soul apart from grace.

Answer: That is really interesting what you said because that would be an anticipation of a Molinist point of view construing foreknowledge in this very broad sense to mean that he knew how they would respond to his gifts of grace.

Followup: Perhaps he foreknew about the coming of Molinism. *[laughter]*

Question: My dad is a campus minister so on campus he has had a few organizations that are more Reformed in theology and into Calvinism. A couple times in the last few years he has had a couple of students come to him, one in particular recently was a girl, and she was crying and she was all upset because she said she tried to accept Christ and she wanted to believe all these things but she was really struggling in her faith and just struggling with her belief. She was just in tears. So she asked, “You think maybe I am one of those people who can’t be saved?” So my question would be – I can’t imagine that the Calvinist is going to say that she could possibly be right – would they say under their understanding of Calvinism that anyone who desires to be saved can be saved, and if so does God not only choose who will be saved but also dictate who will have the desire to be saved?

Answer: I don’t think that there is a sort of doctrinaire position on that question, but I

could well imagine someone saying from the Reformed point of view that anyone who feels that kind of conviction of sin and of the Holy Spirit is on the path toward salvation and regeneration because this is the work of God in her heart. So that minister could give her comfort in that respect, to persevere in her search for God, to keep following, keep thirsting after him, because he's at work in her to bring about these fruit. So she needs to simply keep on pursuing God and she will break through. She will win salvation because God is at work in her to bring that about. So that could actually be a source of comfort to that person.

Followup: OK, but definitively she would be wrong in saying, "I am just one of those people who can't be saved" – that would be a wrong thought on her mind, right?

Answer: Insofar as she is a person who is as you've described. But I could well imagine someone whose heart is hardened, who hates God, who has no interest in spiritual things could, I think, truly say, "Perhaps I am just one of those persons whom God has not chosen." And that might well be true. But it is hard to imagine someone like you described in whom God is so evidently at work being such a person.¹⁰

Question: Bill, you are going to hate me for this but, I have a great deal of difficulty with individual predestination because it seems to undermine the fundamental premise of Christianity that salvation is offered to everyone (John 12, "I'll draw all men to myself" and so forth). Ephesians it seems to me (and I don't think you are going to buy this but) in chapters 1 to 5, if you read the pronouns carefully, it looks to me like what Paul is really saying is that, for example, verse 4 "he chose us" - the Jews. You get down to verse 13 and he says, "In him you also, the Gentiles, you can participate even though you were not chosen." That would seem to be consistent with what Paul says in Romans 1 and Romans 3 that the Gospel was intended first for the Jews then through his ministry for the Gentiles. I think this would support the argument that the predestination concept (or the choice of God for salvation concept) is a group phenomenon analogous to the Old Testament choice of Israel. God chose Israel – not individual Israelites, but he chose the nation. Likewise, it seems to me you could argue that Paul is saying that the Jews were chosen here in Ephesians 1 – but you Gentiles, you can participate also by means of the Gospel message that I am delivering to you.

Answer: So you are saying the switch takes place, what? Verse 11 of chapter 2 where he says, "Therefore, remember that at that time you Gentiles in the flesh," etc. Is that where you see the switch?

Followup: Chapter 1, verse 13 is the first place where he switches from the first person to the second person.

Answer: Oh.

Followup: And then chapter 2 verse 12 he also talks in terms of the second person: "You Gentiles can enjoy the fruits of the Gospel."

Answer: Now, it seems to me that it would be very implausible to think that in chapter 1 that he doesn't mean to include the Ephesians themselves when he says, for example in verse 3, that "God has blessed us in Christ" and that he is just thinking of Jewish

¹⁰ 5:10

Christians there rather than including the Ephesians themselves in that.

Followup: But the Ephesian church, as I understand it, included Jewish and Gentile Christians. So what I am suggesting is you could argue that Ephesians 1 starting in verse 4 when he says that we are chosen (first person, he is talking about the Jewish believers) and then verse 13 he switches to the second person and saying “you also.” After listening to the Gospel and so forth and having believed, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise. There is this dialectic between the first and second persons. I think it continues through the first half of chapter 5. If you read the pronouns carefully it seems to me you could argue that what Paul is saying is “We, Jews, were chosen but you’re not but you can participate and enjoy the benefits also because of the Gospel.”

Answer: That’s a wild view! It would force you to, as I say, re-read this chapter in a very, very different way so that the Gentile Christians are not included in all of these things about being chosen in him and having redemption through his blood and being part of God’s plan and so forth. I have never heard anybody offer that sort of an interpretation of the pronouns before. I think that there probably are other ways to employ your central insight about this being corporate without having to identify the corporate groups dividing them up in the way that you suggest between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, and only the Jewish Christians were chosen and not the Gentile ones. Let’s wait until we get to the Arminian perspective to see more about the corporate interpretation of these verses.

Let me add one thing.¹¹ Someone had questioned last week whether or not the perspective I was representing was something that Calvin himself would have believed. And I found a couple of interesting quotations from Calvin that I thought I would read that I think bear this out. This is from the *Institutes*, section 3:21.5. He says, “By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man.” So there you have this individual predestination that was referred to. “All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.” Then in his treatise *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* he says,

When God prefers some to others, choosing some and passing others by, the difference does not depend on human dignity or indignity. . . . If what I teach is true, that those who perish are destined to death by the eternal good pleasure of God though the reason does not appear, then they are not found but made worthy of destruction. . . . the eternal predestination of God, by which before the fall of Adam He decreed what should take place concerning the whole human race and every individual, was fixed and determined. . . . God chose out of the condemned race of Adam those whom He pleased and reprobated whom He willed.¹²

¹¹ 10:02

¹² John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), pp. 121, 125

So that seems to suggest that Calvin was indeed an advocate of the sort of individual predestination that we spoke of last time.

Calling

Having explained the Reformed scheme of salvation, let's say something more now about the notion of calling which plays a very critical role in the plan of salvation. The Reformed or Calvinist thinker distinguishes between the *general call* of God (which goes out to every person indiscriminately) and the *special effectual call* of God (which is directed only toward the elect, those who have been chosen by God).

The general call to repentance and faith is issued to all of mankind. Examples of this general call would be found, for example, in John 7:37: "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink.'" You notice the universal term there "anyone" – if anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. So this is a general invitation that goes out to all persons. Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Again, notice the universal quantification. "All" who labor and are heavy laden and are invited to come to Christ. This is a general call. And of course finally Matthew 28:18-19 which is the famous Great Commission given to the disciples,

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Here they are commanded to go out to everyone proclaiming the Gospel. Not just to the elect but to everyone. So this is an illustration of the general call that God issues to repentance and faith.

However, this general call is not in itself intrinsically efficacious. People can ignore this general call. They can refuse to respond to it and to repent and believe.¹³ Therefore, the Calvinist distinguishes a special call of God which is irresistible. This is, as we saw last time, called effectual calling. And when this sort of a call confronts a person, it is irresistible and will surely produce its effect. Verses that might be appealed to in this respect would be Romans 8:30, which we read last time. "And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." So this is not just the general call. This is the special effectual calling of the predestined, of the elect. And when he calls them then he justifies them.

Also turn back to Romans 1:6-7 where the Roman Christians are said to be called in this way. Paul says, "including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints . . ." And this is taken to be an example of this effectual calling to these Roman Christians who are called to be saints of God.

Also, 1 Corinthians 1:9, Paul says, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." So here is again supposedly an illustration of this effectual calling to salvation on the part of the Corinthians. Then in verses 26 to 27

¹³ 15:02

of the same chapter,

For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

And so on and so forth. So God has chosen them and now he has called them to be saints.

With respect to this special calling of God, we can distinguish between the efficient cause – the moving or motivating cause – and the instrumental cause. The efficient cause, that is to say, that which produces the effect, is God himself. It is God who effectually calls sinners or the predestined into his Kingdom. Look again at 1 Corinthians 1:9, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son.” It is God here who is the efficient call who brings the elect into the Kingdom. Also, Galatians 1:15. This is Paul reflecting on his own conversion experience. He says, “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me.” So here he refers to God as the one who had set Paul apart even before he was born, like Jeremiah, and then at the right time God called him through his grace.

Finally, 2 Timothy 1:9. Picking up at the end of verse 8, “God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago.” So here again the reference is to God. He, in virtue of his own purpose (not because of anything we’ve done), ages ago he had set us apart and now he has called us into fellowship with himself.

So the efficient cause of this special effectual calling of God directed toward the predestined, toward the elect, by which God brings them into fellowship with himself, is God himself.¹⁴

The moving cause, that which motivates this calling, is simply God’s will. Just God’s will. Look again at 2 Timothy 1:9, “God, who saved us and called us . . . not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace . . . he gave us in Christ.” As we saw in Ephesians, it is simply God’s will. There isn’t anything about the elect that makes them special or more lovable that would motivate God to save them. It is simply God’s inscrutable will. He chooses to save those whom he wills and then he calls them.

Then the instrumental cause, that is to say that by means of which the call goes out, is the Word of God. 2 Thessalonians 2:14, “To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is through the preaching of the Gospel, the Word of God, that they are called.

So through the Gospel as its instrumental cause, God reaches out to those elect (those predestined) and he brings them – he calls them – into his Kingdom and justifies them.

DISCUSSION

Question: I think Ephesians . . . all these steps can be illustrated by the Sermon on the

¹⁴ 20:14

Mount when Jesus said “blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs are the Kingdom of heaven.” So those that Jesus calls as you say God is the initiator of the blessing and those that believe in the Kingdom of God are compelled to comply with the poor in spirit, to humble themselves. So it is like the general call election is thrown out but the character of the person – whether they want to have the Kingdom of God or want to be comforted or want to be filled with righteousness or merciful – those people are compelled to the condition or to the presentation of alternative attitudes. So they are one and the same.

Answer: So you are saying that those whom God has predestined, he produces in them a kind of a poverty of spirit, a humility, so that when the call comes to them they are compelled to respond. Is that the idea?

Followup: He gives them the hope or desire for the Kingdom of God, or hope and desire for being comforted. So they are compelled to follow the truth that is laid before them as the way to get there.

Answer: Yes, that would be an accurate summary of the Calvinist viewpoint.

Question: I have to ask an obvious question here. It seems to me that Calvin could be charged with saying these incidents of this ineffective call – obviously these references disagree with his view of election so he just labels them as ineffective. What evidence is there that they are ineffective, and also why would God do such a pointless thing? Surely he doesn’t fall prey to PR or optics just to say “I’m going to select these but I’m just going to put this out as though I called everyone.” The whole thing sounds, I hate to use the term, ridiculous, but as one that is not really well steeped in religion and philosophy and all I say it sounds ridiculous.

Answer: [laughter] Alright, that is spoken like a good Arminian. If I might try to speak from the Calvinist point of view, perhaps the Calvinist might say that in issuing this general call that God shows mercy toward these non-elect persons in a way that he is not obligated to do.¹⁵ Even to issue this general call is condescending to them, they don’t deserve it, but nevertheless it goes out universally. It would sort of like be common grace. He makes his rain fall on the just and the unjust, his sun shines on the righteous and the wicked alike even though only those who are predestined are able to respond. But, yes, we will see when we get to the Arminian point of view, others have shared your skepticism about this differentiation. I do think that you raise a good point: is one imposing this grid on these verses when they are not effective, then you say, a-ha, this is an example of the general call rather than say there isn’t such a thing as effectual calling. It requires a human response. It would be easy to impose this grid on the verses in the way you described, I think.

Question: Any of you that know me know that I think these things exist in tension – free will and election – because we are bound by time and space. But I found a verse in 2 Timothy to maybe relieve some angst. 2 Timothy 2:24,

And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken

¹⁵ 25:16

them captive to do his will.

Now I'll also link that with Romans 4:17 that says God calls all things as though they are. So God has infinite knowledge, so you have to approach everyone as if they are called and maybe we get people grandfathered or granted in – they get a grant deed. Maybe there is a group that are knowingly predestined and God will allow others to be added to that number based on how things unfold and the responsiveness. Again, you still have the situation where you have human beings bound by time and space trying to figure this out because when you are not infinite these things have to ultimately exist in tension. The practical part about it is you go about the activity of sharing Christ in the hope that everybody is saved.

Answer: Yes, there you are making a good point. Since we don't know the identity of the elect, we carry out the Great Commission sharing it with all people hoping that perhaps these people are elect. The verse you read is a good Calvinistic verse. He said, "God may perhaps grant that they will repent." He doesn't say "perhaps they will repent" but "God may perhaps grant that they will repent and escape the snare of the devil." So the idea, I think you are quite right in saying, is that we indiscriminately share the Gospel not knowing who the elect are. But from a Calvinistic point of view, you must not think that what you said was accurate that God will take into account certain responsiveness and things of that sort. That begins to initiate then this human element which the Calvinist wants to exclude. We can introduce a couple of words here. He wants salvation to be monergistic. That is to say God is the only one at work; not synergistic where it is a cooperative effort of human beings and God. The Calvinist will accuse the Arminian of synergism – of making salvation something that is wrought by the cooperation of man and God together whereas salvation should be monergistic, solely wrought by God alone and therefore to God be the glory.¹⁶

Regeneration

Let me go on to the next point which is regeneration. For those who are effectually called, having been predestined by God, God will then produce regeneration in them. This means a quickening, of bringing, of spiritual life, where before there was simply spiritual death. So God makes them alive.

In the Calvinistic system, regeneration is explanatorily prior to faith. It is not something that comes in response to faith. It is actually explanatorily prior to faith. A spiritually dead person cannot exercise saving faith. He is spiritually dead. So, God must do first the work of regenerating him and then he will place his faith in Christ. Now that doesn't mean that these are chronologically one after the other – that first God regenerates him and then he places his faith in Christ. It could happen like that but it could also be simultaneous – it could happen at the same time. God regenerates the person and he places his faith in Christ. But that is why I said it is an explanatory priority that is in play here, not a chronological priority. The faith is the result of God's regenerative work. It is not that the person has faith and God regenerates him as a result.

If you don't understand the idea of explanatory priority, let me give an illustration to try

¹⁶ 30:12

to make it clear. Imagine a chandelier hanging from the ceiling. The chain is explanatorily prior to the chandelier dangling there in the air. It isn't the chandelier that is forcing the chain up to the ceiling. It is the chain that is holding the chandelier – even though they are simultaneous. It is not as though there is first the chain and then the chandelier. They are simultaneous. But the relation of dependence is that the chandelier depends on the chain. It is not that the chain depends on the chandelier. So the chain is explanatorily prior to the chandelier dangling in the air. If you were to say “Why is the chandelier dangling in the air” the answer would be “because it is suspended by the chain from the ceiling.” In the same way, even if regeneration and faith take place simultaneously in a person's life, the person has faith because God has regenerated him. A spiritually dead person cannot have saving faith in Christ. So he needs to be first regenerated and then he can place his faith in Christ.

That is really an interesting view when you think about it because what that means is that salvation is not given in response to faith. It is not as though you place your faith in Christ and God saves you. Really what happens with the elect is God does this secret work in their heart – he saves them – and then they place their faith in Christ. Faith is the result of being regenerated. Only regenerate people can have faith in Christ. An unregenerate, spiritually dead person can't exercise saving faith. So on the Calvinist scheme, even if these occur simultaneously, regeneration explains saving faith.

Conversion then may come some time later. The person then may, having been regenerated, then begin to seek out baptism and begin to identify as a Christian and to read the Bible and to pray and so forth. These would be the fruits produced in his life by regeneration. Saving faith for the Calvinist will involve the elements of knowledge, ascent, and trust. First he will understand what there is to be believed; he will have knowledge of the Gospel. He will ascent to it – he will give his agreement with it. Then finally he will trust in what he believes to be true.¹⁷ So genuine saving faith involves these three elements: knowledge or understanding, ascent – agreement, but then also this personal trust – trusting in Christ, trusting in God. This kind of saving faith is something that only a regenerate person can exercise.

DISCUSSION

Question: A simpler way to see regeneration probably is to see possibility like when our relationship with God is broken, you don't see any possibility to reconcile until God shows you this possibility and so your faith can kick in.

Answer: It is even more than that. I like the way you put it. There is no possibility of an unregenerate person having saving faith. But he needs to see more than just a possibility. God needs to zap him – regenerate him – and then he can have saving faith. So it is like, if I may use an analogy (maybe this isn't good) it is like a dead car battery. A dead car battery won't start the car. It doesn't do any good to turn the ignition if the battery is dead. You have got to have those jumper cables to zap the battery and then you can turn the key; then the ignition will work. So the regeneration is like the jumper cables zapping the battery which was dead, now becomes alive, and then the faith is like turning the key

¹⁷ 35:02

in the ignition and the car starts.

Followup: I thought of it more like an elephant that is being staked – it is confined by a stake. And then they don't know that they can get out of that realm until someone shows them that they can get out of it. Then they are set free to believe on.

Answer: You are at liberty to hold that view yourself, but don't think that that represents the Calvinist view which is what we are trying to understand. We are not talking here about a living person that is confined. We are talking about a spiritually dead person. It is like an elephant corpse. It is not some living elephant that is confined and needs to get out. That would be just totally the opposite because there there is something that just needs to break free. Here this is a spiritually dead person that needs God to call him, regenerate him, give him justifying grace, and then that person can have faith in Christ.

Next time we will turn to an Arminian perspective on these same passages.¹⁸

¹⁸ Total Running Time: 38:28 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 3

Arminianism

Arminianism

Last time we completed our overview of a Calvinist view of certain key biblical passages with regard to the doctrine of salvation. Now we want to look at these passages from an Arminian point of view. Just as I emphasized that in speaking of Calvinism I wasn't trying to explore John Calvin's own view personally but rather the theology that goes by the name Calvinism; similarly, we are not looking at Jacob Arminius' particular views on these passages but rather that theology that goes under the name Arminianism.

Interpretation of Ephesians 1:3-14

Let's turn to Ephesians 1:3-14. Paul writes,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious 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. For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Two points of interpretation need to be emphasized in the Arminian understanding of these passages.

1. *Election is Christocentric.* That is to say, it is in Christ that a person is elect. You find this all the way through this passage. For example, in verse 3 he "has blessed us in Christ." In verse 4, "he chose us in him." In verse 7, "in him we have redemption through his blood." In verse 10, "to unite all things in him." In verse 11, "in him we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed." In verse 13, "in him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." So election is Christocentric. It concerns those who are in Christ. Insofar as a person is in Christ he is elected and predestined as the passage teaches.

2. In connection with that, *election is primarily corporate in nature, rather than*

individual. That is to say it is a body or group or corporate entity that God has elected. Insofar as one is a part of that corporate group or body one shares in the blessings. One is in Christ and therefore is elected and predestined and all the rest.

If you are interested in seeing an Arminian perspective on this passage, I highly recommend this little book by Robert Shank called *Elect in the Son*.¹⁹ Let me just read a couple of passages from this book on the notion of corporate election.²⁰ This is from page 45 of *Elect in the Son*. Shank says,

A second aspect of election is implicit in Paul's Ephesian doxology: the election to salvation is *corporate* as well as Christocentric.

The corporate nature of election has been noted by many. In his comment on Ephesians 1:4 . . . Lightfoot writes, "The election of Christ involves implicitly the election of the church." Westcott comments on Ephesians 1:4, "*exelexato] He chose us* (i.e. Christians as a body v. 3) for Himself out of the world." Bloomfield comments on Ephesians 1:5, ". . . the Apostle has here no reference to the *personal* election of *individuals*. . . ." Lange comments on Ephesians 1:3,

. . . "us" should be taken in its wider meaning . . . and should not be limited to the Apostle . . . nor to the Jewish Christians, but applies to his people, all men, who have become or will become Christians.

The corporate inference in Lange's words above is substantiated by his comment on Romans 8:28-30, ". . . Christ is the elect in God's real kingdom in the absolute sense, so that all His followers are chosen with Him as organic members, according to their organic relations (Eph. i)."

Obviously, the corporate body of the elect is comprised of individuals. But the election is primarily corporate and only secondarily particular. The thesis that election is corporate, as Paul understood it and viewed it in the Ephesian doxology, is supported by the whole context of his epistle:

[What follows now is a quotation of various phrases from Paul that indicate the corporate nature of the election.]

. . . gather together in one all things in Christ . . . the redemption of the purchased possession . . . his inheritance in the saints . . . the church, which is his body . . . who has made us both one . . . to make in himself of twain one new man . . . that he might reconcile both unto God in one body . . . the household of God . . . all the building fitly framed together . . . a holy temple . . . builded together for an habitation of God . . . of the same body . . . the mystery from the beginning of the world [now disclosed in] the church [as fulfillment of] the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord . . . of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named . . . glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages . . . one body . . . the body of Christ . . . the whole body fitly joined together . . . increase of the body . . . we are members of one another . . . Christ is the head of the church . . . the savior of the body . . . Christ loved the church and gave himself for

¹⁹ Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1989).

²⁰ 5:15

it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church . . . they two shall be one flesh [but] I speak concerning Christ and the church.

So according to Shank, Paul's concept of election is primarily of this corporate group or this body of people that God has called and elected to justify, save, and bring to glory. It is up to individuals whether or not one wants to be a part of that corporate body. How does one become part of that corporate body? Well, through placing faith in Christ.

So it is insofar as one is "in Christ" – part of this corporate body – that one is elect.²¹

There is one more passage from Shank from page 48 that I would like to read. Here he contrasts Calvin's doctrine of election with the Arminian doctrine. He says,

A central thesis of Calvin's doctrine of election may be stated thus:

The election to salvation is of particular men unconditionally, who comprise the corporate body incidentally.

[By contrast,] a central thesis of the Biblical doctrine of election [that is to say, from an Arminian view] may be stated thus:

The election to salvation is corporate and comprehends individual men only in identification and association with the elect body.

So on Shank's view, the object of God's election is this corporate group. That is the primary object of election. Individuals are elect only in a secondary sense insofar as they are part of, or members of, that group and have identified with it and therefore come to share in its blessings.

That would be how an Arminian would understand Ephesians 1.

Interpretation of Romans 8:28-30

Let's turn back to Romans 8:28-30, the other passage we previously looked at. Paul says,

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What the Arminian emphasizes is that God's calling here by which he calls people to salvation is not an insincere call. This is a genuine call to which people can respond. God really wants them to respond and be saved. So, for example, look at 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

So God does not want anyone to perish. He wants all to reach repentance. Similarly, in 1 Timothy 2:4, Paul writes God our Savior "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

²¹ 10:03

So this call that goes out to people to salvation is a sincere call. God genuinely wants all persons to be saved and does not want any to perish. On page 165, Shank writes as follows. He's referring now to the Calvinist view. He is criticizing the Calvinist view.

Thus the call, addressed by God to all, by design of God is *not* to all, but only to some [on the Calvinist view]. The ungodly have "an asylum to which they may betake themselves from the bondage of sin," [to quote Calvin] and they are utterly without excuse for not doing so – despite the fact that God by immutable decree has rendered them totally unable to do anything other than to "ungratefully reject the offer that is made to them." When God asks "Why will you die?" the real answer is that God has so ordained.²² "God so loved the world" that He determined that few shall believe and be saved. "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," cries God to a lost world . . . while making certain that most men do not comply. "Whosoever will, let him come," pleads the Risen Christ . . . while the Father makes certain that most men will not come. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" . . . but He has effected a "hidden" arrangement ensuring that most of the world *shall not* be saved.

Obviously, he is writing there with considerable sarcasm about the Calvinist view saying that, in effect, the call to repentance and salvation on the Calvinist view is insincere. It is a sham because even though God issues this universal call he himself wills that not all respond to it and does not give his saving grace to people to enable them to respond to it.

In addition to that, Shank draws a distinction between election and predestination. He distinguishes between these two factors. Election would be this corporate calling, this calling out of a church or a people or a body. That is a corporate notion. Predestination, by contrast, he would see as foreordaining the elect to conformity to the image of Christ. So anyone who is a part of that elect body is predestined to be conformed to Christ's image. That is what it says in Romans 8:28-30. To return to that, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." So predestination is not the same as election. Election is this corporate calling, and predestination is God's ordaining that those who are members of the elect body will be conformed to the image of Christ, will be sanctified, justified, and glorified eventually.

That would be how the Arminian would understand these two passages.

DISCUSSION

Question: I might be misunderstanding this but it seems to me that this idea of the corporate group is totally ineffectual because it sounds like the corporate group doesn't define everyone in the group to be elect but there are some in the corporate group that will be elect and if you are elect you are part of the corporate group. So the corporate group does not *a priori* define the group of people who are elect. It just says those who believe are elect - it is self-fulfilling.

Answer: I think that is right. It would be to say that we are going to have a group of

²² 15:09

people who will say “Go on a tour of Israel with Bryant Wright. Anyone who wants to sign up can do so. But those who go on the tour are guaranteed to visit the Sea of Galilee, to walk the walls of Jerusalem, to visit the garden tomb, and so forth because that is what is planned.” But that is no guarantee who is in the group. So I think that that is right. That is what is correct. Here God has predestined or ordained that this group will be justified, sanctified, glorified, and so forth, but that doesn’t guarantee who is in the group. It is primarily a corporate notion and it becomes individual only secondarily in virtue of people joining the group.

Question: I also tend to push back against what I guess you can call unbridled ecclesiasticism. There are a lot of people that have the idea that rather than having a relationship with God they will just be sure they are OK with the church and it is the church’s job to have the relationship with God. Now, in fact, the church is not necessary for anybody’s salvation. The only things that are necessary for salvation is a gracious God, a repentant sinner, and a Savior making intermeditation for us.²³ Now the church is the bride of Christ and I think Ephesians (a lot of people that write about Ephesians say) that is the subject of Ephesians: the body of Christ. And this is a wonderful thing, but it can lead to abuse over the centuries. Even I think the most enthusiastic Jesuit scholars will say abuse in the form of, for example, indulgences and things like this led into this idea that the church is the one that actually adjusts your relationship with God and brings about your salvation. I don’t think that is in any way biblical.

Answer: Don’t you think though that this abuse results from confusing the church – which is the body of Christ – with a particular institution which is not necessarily identical with that body of Christ. I take it that insofar as the church is the body of Christ, that group of redeemed people, you cannot be saved if you are not a member of the church. But that isn’t identified with your Baptist church, or your Catholic church, or your Orthodox church, or any institutional church. This is the church universal to which I would say every redeemed person belongs.

Followup: Let me take issue with your statement that you can’t be saved outside the church. The thief on the cross who is an example of many things is also an example – this was way before Pentecost, there was no church at all – and yet he was saved by the word of Christ. I understand the point you are making. You have the true church which unfortunately is rather small, I think. That is the body of all believers who are actually trusting Christ and have made that personal (by the way you must be born again) decision that you must make to do that. Then you have got the professing church or Christendom or whatever, and that is just people that put down Christian versus atheist or anything else. So you are absolutely right about that. But what I am saying is, and let me get this point across too, I’ve talked to a lot of unbelievers that say, “You know, I have a problem with organized religion.” And you know what? I have to agree with them. I have a problem with organized religion, too. It comes down to who is doing the organizing. When man starts getting in there and messing things up you have big time problems. If the Holy Spirit is doing the organizing – which he does of this true church that you’ve just described – they are led by the Holy Spirit and not by some corporate thing where Satan has had centuries to infiltrate and bring about his will which I think he has done in

²³ 20:01

a lot of ways. So I see your point and that is absolutely right but what I am saying is I tend to push back because I think a lot of people do have this idea that, “Oh, the church will interact with God. As long as I do this and show up every once in a while and give a little money I don’t have to have any relationship with God. I will let them do that.” True Christians, of course, are not going to do that; they have a relationship with God.

Answer: Yes. And as long as we keep in mind this distinction between human institutions and the true church which is the body of Christ, those who are indwelt by his Holy Spirit and redeemed by him in the post-Pentecostal period. It seems to me that we can guard against that kind of abuse that you want quite rightly to warn us about. I am talking about the church in the sense in which Paul spoke of the church which was obviously prior to any of these sorts of institutions. When Paul talks about the church he just means the assembly of these early believers.

Question: In defending Arminianism, I think the call is – I agree with corporate call, because it is purpose driven and it is principle based. So those that are elected, they respond to that purpose and to those principles. So in that sense it is a corporate call.

Answer: OK.

Followup: And so then you say individuals can decide whether they join that purpose and then they base on those principles and whether they join in or they fall away.

Answer: I don’t think that the distinction between Calvinism and Arminianism with regard to calling is between corporate and individual so much as it is between the general call and the so-called effectual calling. Remember on the Calvinist view there is this general call that you could call corporate – it goes out.²⁴ But the Arminian regards this as really a sham. It is really insincere. The real call is this hidden, so-called effectual call that goes out just to the elect, chosen by God, which enables them to respond. The others God passes over and doesn’t really want to save them. What the Arminian wants to say about calling is that God’s call is genuine, it is sincere, he really does want everyone to respond and be saved, and the only reason that some people are not saved is because they willingly reject the work of God’s Spirit upon their life. It has to do with whether grace is resistible or irresistible, I think.

Next time we will look at the Arminian view of faith and contrast that with what we saw about the Calvinistic view of faith.²⁵

²⁴ 25:01

²⁵ Total Running Time: 26:04 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 4

Evaluation of Calvinism and Arminianism

In our lesson we have been looking most recently at an Arminian perspective on Ephesians 1 and Romans 8:28-30. We saw that in contrast to a Calvinistic interpretation of these passages, the Arminian tends to interpret these passages Christocentrically and corporately. That is to say, we are objects of God's predestination only secondarily. The primary object of God's predestination is a people – a group – whom he has elected for himself. And insofar as we are members of this corporate group, we are the objects of his election and therefore predestined to conformity to Christ's image.

Faith

Let's turn then now to how the Arminian looks at faith.

For the Arminian, faith is not something that is bestowed upon us by God prior to and independent of our own exercise or free decision to believe in Christ. Romans 9:18, 22-24, 30-31. In Romans 9:18, Paul writes, "So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills." It is God's discretion whom he shall save and whom he shall pass over. It is up to God. Verses 22-24 explains who it is then that God has chosen to have mercy upon. He says,

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

So God, in his sovereignty, has chosen to elect for himself not simply Jewish people but Gentile peoples as well. No Jewish person can gainsay God's decision in this matter because God is sovereign. He has mercy upon whomever he wills and hardens the heart of whomever he wills, and he has chosen to save Gentiles as well as Jews. So then, in verses 30-31, Paul says,

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but that Israel who pursued the righteousness which is based on law did not succeed in fulfilling that law.

It is through faith that one comes to be a part of this elect body. God has chosen to save all who have faith in Christ Jesus. Whether Jew or Gentile, this is his sovereign choice. Similarly, over in Galatians 3:6-9, Paul says,

Thus Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

[Not just the Jews only, but those from the Gentiles who have faith are reckoned as sons of Abraham.]

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,

preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

Faith is the key factor in putting oneself into this elect body of persons that God has chosen. It is faith which qualifies you to be a son of Abraham and heir to God’s promises.²⁶

Finally, Romans 10:12-13. Back to Romans again,

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For, “every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

So faith is the distinguishing factor in who is elect and who is non-elect. It doesn’t matter whether you are Jew or Gentile. All who have faith in Christ Jesus will be saved.

Ephesians 2:8 emphasizes that this setup, this arrangement, is by God’s own choice. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God — not because of works, lest any man should boast.” Remember we saw that the word “this” is neuter whereas faith is feminine. So “this” doesn’t refer to the faith, this refers to this arrangement of salvation by grace through faith. That arrangement is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God. It is God’s sovereign choice to save people in this way by grace through faith. Faith is the key factor here in determining whether or not you are part of the elect, part of the predestined.

The Arminian, in contrast to the Calvinist, regards God’s grace which is freely offered to all as resistible. Look, for example, at Acts 7:51. This is Stephen’s statement just before his stoning. In verse 51 he says to the people around him, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.” So this is not irresistible; this is resistible. God’s saving grace is offered freely to all persons, and those who respond with faith will be saved and be part of the elect group, but this is not an irresistible, unilateral work of God. This is a work that requires a free human response.

That completes my exposition of an Arminian interpretation of these passages.

DISCUSSION

Question: If I understood that correctly, you are saying that from an Arminian standpoint grace is offered to all and then the individual chooses whether to accept it or deny it.

Answer: Yes.

Followup: Therefore, the human is, in my way of looking at it, placing himself as the decision maker and God is just waiting to hear whether the human will accept or not. It almost puts man above God in the sense that now man is making the decision. Shall I accept this? Or shall I not accept this?

Answer: I would say that is almost right except that we shouldn’t think of God as a

²⁶ 5:03

passive participant in this process. God is actively trying to win the unbeliever by giving him the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, various gifts of grace. God is actively drawing this person to himself but not irresistibly so. At the end of the day, God is not going to unilaterally move that person's will to have faith in him. He is going to allow that person the freedom to finally reject him and to separate himself from God forever.²⁷

Followup: So if God is working out his plan of salvation, is he not then not certain of the ultimate of that plan because he is still waiting to see – even though he offered this – it is still this human's decision of his own free will whether to accept it or not.

Answer: Well, now, that would depend on whether or not you think that God knows the free decisions that people will make. If you remember our section on divine omniscience, I think God knows every future-tensed truth. So he knows that Joe will place his faith in Christ at the Billy Graham crusade. He knows that Sally will reject the Gospel when her roommate shares the four spiritual laws, etc., etc. So to say that God allows people the freedom to accept or reject his saving grace doesn't mean that he is ignorant or has to wait around to find out. He knows all of these things in advance.

Followup: Does that in any way affect his being all-powerful? It puts him in a light of inability to make something happen.

Answer: Recall our discussion of divine omnipotence when we discussed that in the attributes of God. We said that being omnipotent doesn't mean the ability to do the logically impossible, like to make a round square or a married bachelor. And it is logically impossible to make someone freely do something. So God's inability to make someone freely receive him or reject him isn't any infringement of omnipotence anymore than his inability to make a stone too heavy for him to lift would be an infringement of his omnipotence. So I think that human freedom is quite consistent with God's omnipotence, but it does mean that God isn't the unilateral cause of everything that happens. He gives to human beings the ability to make decisions that are not determined by God himself. That would be the Arminian perspective.

Question: Do the Arminians believe that you could lose your faith? Once you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and you become a Christian, can you lose it?

Answer: I think that depends on which denomination you are talking about. Certainly some do. For example, Methodists would be Arminian and Methodists would generally think that, yes, you can apostatize and lose your faith. On the other hand, many Baptists are Arminian in their view of receiving Christ but very often they will say that it is impossible to fall away. Once you've exercised genuine faith in Christ you cannot fall away. We are going to take this up as our next topic. So we will have a longer discussion of this.

Question: Just a brief mention – one of the best books, I think, on that subject arguing for conditional security is called *The Believer's Conditional Security* by Dan Corner. If you want to read arguments for that, that's one.

Answer: OK. Thank you.

Question: Following up on a past question, if Peter said that God desires that no one

²⁷ 10:11

should perish but all have eternal life, so if he is wooing us, what is restraining him? He is omniscience. Wouldn't he know what would be the right persuasive method to call someone to come to Christ? And since a lot don't, does that mean there was never any chance for them?

Answer: Ultimately, from an Arminian perspective, even though God's will is that all should be saved and he issues a genuine, sincere call to repentance, ultimately it will be human freedom that would preclude God's universal salvific will from being accomplished. Indeed, this would be probably one for the strongest arguments for freedom of the will that the Arminian could give – the fact that universalism isn't true. The New Testament is abundantly clear that not all will be saved, and yet it also says that God wills and wants all to be saved.²⁸ The only thing that could seem to prevent God's will from being done would be human freedom. People simply resist God's every effort to save them. Now your question is more subtle, and we can take that up maybe in a later time. You are asking, "Suppose John resists God's saving grace and so is damned. Couldn't God have given John some other sort of circumstances or grace that might have led to an affirmative free response by John?" I'll say something about that later, but that is not an inherent part of the Arminian position. Arminians might have a variety of answers to that question. We will hold off on that one for now.

Evaluation of These Competing Views

Let me say something by way of evaluation about these competing views.

It seems to me that the notion of corporate election does make good sense of many of the scriptural passages, particularly Romans 9 and 10 as I've said. It seems to me that Paul's burden in Romans 9 is to say that it is up to God whom he will save and whom he will damn. And that he wants to broaden out the scope of salvation to include Gentiles as well as Jews. So God has decided to save all who will place their faith in Christ regardless of their ethnic origin. That is why in chapter 10 Paul can say, "Therefore everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." – a statement that would be impossible on the Calvinistic view because only those who are elect and irresistibly and effectually called can be saved. So the view of corporate election, I think, makes very good sense out of Romans 9 and 10 as well as so many of the corporate metaphors that Paul uses in his epistles like the body of Christ, the church, the olive tree with branches broken off and grafted in, and so forth.

Having said that however, I do not think that corporate election is the whole story. I say this on the basis of passages like Acts 13:48. Here Luke is describing the response to the apostles' preaching, and he says, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." What a remarkable statement that is. "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." That can't plausibly be construed corporately. He is talking there about individual people who responded to the preaching of the Gospel. As many as were ordained to eternal life believed in the Gospel.

The verb here is the past-perfect of the word *tasso* in the Greek which means "to appoint"

²⁸ 15:08

or “to designate” or “to set aside.” It indicates that those whom God has set aside or appointed or designated to salvation or eternal life will be saved. The Arminian attempts to interpret this passage by saying what it means is as many as were disposed to eternal life believed. So if you had the disposition that was right for eternal life then you believed. Therefore, it was of your own free will.

But I am not persuaded that that is a plausible interpretation of this passage. Let me give two reasons why I think that that is incorrect. First, as I say, the form of the verb there is in the passive voice. That indicates that God is the subject. That is to say, it is all of those whom God had ordained to eternal life. The use of the passive voice is indicative that God is the active subject of the verb. He is the one who has appointed or set aside certain people to eternal life.²⁹ Moreover, the context of the theology of the book of Acts, I think, doesn’t sit very well with that Arminian interpretation. The context of the book of Acts shows, I think, that Luke believes that people are foreordained to eternal life as individuals. Look, for example, at Acts 4:24-28. Here the early church is at prayer and Luke records,

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said,
 “Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and
 everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say
 by the Holy Spirit,

‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
 and the peoples imagine vain things?
 The kings of the earth set themselves in array,
 and the rulers were gathered together,
 against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus,
 whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate [notice, they are named as
 individuals], with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand
 and thy plan had predestined to take place.

Isn’t that remarkable? Herod and Pilate named as individuals along with the people of Jerusalem and the Gentiles, they were there to do whatever God’s hand and plan had foreordained. The expression in the Greek here is *he boule proorisen*. *Proorisen* means “to ordain something in advance.” Whatever your will foreordained to happen is what took place in Jerusalem. Also, take a look at Acts 2:23 for a similar statement. Here Peter says, “this Jesus [again, a specific individual], delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” Notice here he speaks of the definite plan and foreknowledge of God which included the crucifixion of Jesus. The Greek here, again, is *te horismene boule* (that’s the word for God’s will) – your foreordained will. It’s the same root word from *proorisen*. Your foreordained will and (and then here comes the word for foreknowledge) *prognosei tou theou*. The foreknowledge of God. So the ordained will and *prognosei tou theou* – the foreknowledge of God. This is what has determined will take place.

Compare with this Galatians 1:15. Here Paul is talking about his own call. He says, in

²⁹ 20:06

verse 15 of chapter 1, “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me,” etc., etc. Here the word in the Greek is *aphorisas* which means “to set apart” or “to put aside.” He says that God has set him aside even before he was born, clearly as an individual. We are not talking corporate election here.

Finally, go back to Acts 9:15. It also speaks about this call of the apostle Paul.³⁰ Here the Lord says to Ananias, “Go, for he [that is, Paul] is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.” The Greek here is *skeuos ekloges* which means “a chosen vessel” or “an instrument” that God has chosen to use.

So both Paul and Luke think of Paul himself as someone set apart by God, a chosen instrument or vessel that God has then called at this appropriate time. Again, this can’t be thought of as primarily corporate.

On the other hand, Paul apparently did not think that this call that came to him was irresistible or inevitable. He says in Acts 26:19 in his testimony to King Agrippa, “Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus,” etc., etc. So even though Paul felt that God had set him apart before he was born as an individual and then called him at the right time – he was a chosen instrument – Paul didn't seem to think that this was something that was irresistible or inevitable. Rather, he said “I wasn’t disobedient. I obeyed the heavenly vision and did what I was told to.”

So on the one hand we have this sovereignty of God that does seem to extend to individuals. Yet, at the same time, we have this affirmation of human freedom that one is able to resist what God has planned and ordained.

How are we to best put these together? Well, as some of you might surmise, I think that the best way to understand these passages is through divine middle knowledge. This is the Molinist view of divine providence from the Jesuit Counter-Reformer Luis Molina. According to Molina, God knows how every possible person he might create would freely respond in any set of circumstances that God might place him in. This provides the key to his providence just as it states in the book of Acts. This is according to the foreknowledge and plan of God. God knew how Herod and Pilate would respond if in positions of authority in first century Palestine. He knew how the Jews in the city of Jerusalem would respond in those circumstances. How the Gentiles would behave. So all of this plan unfolds according to God’s foreknowledge according to his understanding.

For Molina, the circumstances in which God places people includes various gifts of grace and workings of the Holy Spirit to bring people to salvation. God knows whether or not a person would respond to his grace in any set of circumstances that he might place that individual. So, for example, he knew that if he were to appear to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road as he was journeying to Damascus to persecute Christians that Saul would freely obey the heavenly vision and would not be disobedient. Therefore, he chooses to appear to Saul in this way. Not robbing Saul of his freedom, but knowing how Saul would freely respond in such a circumstance. So God knows which people to create and what circumstances to place them in in order to bring about the salvation of those that

³⁰ 25:06

he wants to be saved. Acts 17:26-27 is Paul's address to the Areopagus in Athens. He says,

And he made from one [man] every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us.

Here Paul says that God has determined the exact times and places that every human being should live in the world with a view toward achieving their salvation.³¹ So even before the foundation of the world, God knew which people would freely respond to his grace and be saved and which would reject it. Therefore, he knew the people who had been chosen and set apart to be saved. That is what it says in Romans 8:29, that those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Molina also believed that God provides sufficient grace for salvation to every person that he creates. God's will for human salvation is truly universal. God wants everyone to be saved, and moreover this grace is given to all persons that is sufficient for their salvation.

Now, does God really in fact want all persons to be saved in the way that Molina described? Well, I think there are a couple of options here. One of the options is a form of Molinism that is called Congruism. This school of thought says that there is congruent grace that God offers. That is to say, God knows for any individual person what gifts of grace would be met with a free, affirmative response by that person. He knows, as someone said earlier, what circumstances to place that person in in such a way that that person would freely respond and be saved. If that is the case, that God knows the circumstances under which every possible person would be saved, why isn't everybody saved? Well, the Congruist could say it is because there is no feasible world available to God in which all of these circumstances are compossible – that is to say, the circumstances may not be able to be cobbled together in such a way that everyone would be saved. It may well be the case that in every world that is feasible for God of free creatures that some would freely reject his grace and be lost. So, although there are possible worlds in which everyone is freely saved, it may well be the case that there are no feasible worlds available to God in which there is universal salvation.

Or, here's the second alternative, the second option. The Molinist could just say God prefers a world in which not all respond and are saved even though he could have chosen such a world. He has simply chosen not to create a world in which everybody is freely saved. That view gets you as close to Calvinism as you can possibly get and yet still affirms human free will. It is to say that God could have elected to save all, but he has chosen to create a world in which he knew some would freely reject him. Why did he choose such a world? Let the Calvinist answer that – maybe to bring greater glory to himself somehow by showing his justice or something. I don't know. But the point is that this will get you everything that the Calvinist wants to have but it will not annihilate human freedom. It will still give you human freedom.

So there are a couple of options here that are available in answer to that earlier question as to why God's universal salvific will is not achieved. But it does seem to me that a

³¹ 30:32

middle knowledge perspective supplements what we've already seen with regard to corporate election by showing how people can be predestined and foreordained and elected as individuals and yet in a way that is fully compatible with human freedom.³²

³² Total Running Time: 35:17 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 5

The Mystical Union of the Believer with Christ, Part 1

We've been talking about the Doctrine of Salvation, and today we are turning to a new subsection on our so-called *mystical union* with Christ. This is a wonderful lesson, I think, which will be of real encouragement to every regenerate believer.

But before we do so, I promised to give some time for any discussion from last week's lesson on the doctrine of election, and the contrast between Calvinist and Arminian views, and then my proposed Molinist solution to the problems.

DISCUSSION

Question: A couple of points for clarification from last time. The issue of the term "all." Sometimes I think the term "all" in Scripture is not inclusive but is "all" without distinction but not "all" without exception. I think that is one clarifying principle. The other is God's will came up relative to election or non-election and so forth. I think of God's will in terms of four aspects. There is his absolute will which is purpose. He's got a prescriptive will which is Scripture. He's got an emotive will like God's not willing that any should perish but some do. And then he's got a permissive will for believers where he's got a path for you to walk but he'll give you a certain amount of rope before he takes action to bring you back to it. So he's got a permissive will. So I see those four aspects, and this can hopefully shine some light or background.

Answer: Yes. All right, your question opens a can of worms but let's try to address it briefly in light of what I've already said. The first point that you made with respect to the word "all" – I think where this becomes relevant is with respect to these texts about God's universal salvific will where Scripture says God is not willing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.³³ Again, it says God wants all persons to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.³⁴ The Arminian and the Molinist takes those passages at face value – "all" means literally everyone. God wants everyone to be saved. The Calvinist is the one who has to make the distinction that you have suggested – that "all" may not mean literally everyone but just all types of people or without distinctions among people, but God doesn't literally want all people to be saved or else they all would be saved. Here I confess I find the Arminian-Molinist interpretation to be much more plausible. It takes the passage at face value and it is so consistent with the love of God, that God's love would be extended to all persons, that he would want all to be saved. So my own view would be that we ought to take these passages as meaning universal unless there were some other consideration that would drive us away from that and I don't think that there is, as I've explained.

With respect to the second point that you make: the different ways in which we can talk

³³ cf. 2 Peter 3:9

³⁴ cf. 1 Timothy 2:4

about God's will – his absolute will, prescriptive will, emotive will, permissive will. It seems again to me that these distinctions are important but that they only make sense within an Arminian-Molinist point of view because they presuppose libertarian freedom. If you don't think that human beings have the freedom to do other than God absolutely wills then the distinction between God's absolute will and his permissive will collapses. I don't see how the Calvinist can make a serious distinction between God's prescriptive or absolute will and his permissive will because he is the only agent who acts unilaterally. He determines everything that will happen.³⁵ So the distinction between permission and prescription just collapses, it seems to me, on Calvinism, whereas on Arminianism or Molinism God does will in this absolute sense that all persons be saved but universalism isn't true because there is the permissive will of God; namely, he permits some people to reject him and his grace and so separate themselves from him forever despite his absolute intention that they be saved. So, as an Arminian-Molinist, I would agree with the distinctions that you are making there, and I think they only make good sense on the view that people have libertarian freedom.

Question: I know we ended the last class, we were talking about whether we can resist God's will or his calling, which was part of the big differentiation between the two. So the main one that I thought of was Jonah. God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah basically says "no" and he goes in the opposite direction. Then God uses his middle knowledge and knows "If I cause a storm, he gets thrown over the boat, I have him swallowed by a fish, he is going to use his free will to change his mind and go to Nineveh. And my will will be done through his free will." To me, that makes sense on an Arminian standpoint, right? Jonah had the ability to resist God's will, but then God used middle knowledge to get him to do his will after all. But under the Calvinist, it seems like they would have to say, "No. When God called Jonah to go to Nineveh, he never intended for Jonah to actually go to Nineveh. He actually intended for Jonah to say no to him so that he could increase Jonah's faith in the long run by making these things happen and him doing it later." To me that just sounds kind of manipulative, almost kind of dishonest and deceptive in a way. It is like "I am telling you to do this, but I am going to make sure you don't do my will right now. And you resist it so I can have other purposes." Is that what they would believe?

Answer: I think you've accurately characterized the difference between them. I think the Jonah story is a good illustration of freedom within God's sovereign direction and ability to change the circumstances knowing, for example, that the sailors would freely throw him overboard in the storm, that he would be swallowed up by this fish, that he would, if then delivered, obey God and proclaim the message of judgment to Nineveh. All of that makes, I think, very good sense on a libertarian view. But on the other view I think you are absolutely right. You'd have to say that God is just basically pulling the strings to make the puppet move in a certain way. That would include disobedience and the rest of the story. So yes, I think you have contrasted them well.

Question: The Molinist perspective, which is very, very appealing, a Calvinist and some also open theists have this objective in common – it's this grounding objective. I have a response to this. It is an epistemic one. We wouldn't have the capacity to know how

³⁵ 4:59

exactly God could ground this and exactly know what they would choose, if it is a future contingency, if he is not actually determining it.

Answer: Let me interrupt at this point and say that that was discussed when we did our study of divine omniscience. When we looked at the attributes of God and talked about middle knowledge and objections to it. So what we are doing here is simply discussing contrasting views of providence given that you have Molinism or Calvinism. So I don't want to answer that question because it would rehearse old material. But I'll just refer you to the Defenders classes on Doctrine of God and the subsection on divine omniscience. We talk about it there.

Question: Can you respond to the accusation: Could Lazarus have chosen not to be risen from the dead? There is an accusation by Calvinists that regeneration is something like Lazarus' rising from the dead. Jesus uses this as an object lesson. I am the resurrection and the life. Lazarus was monergistically brought back from the dead. Where does this parallel break down?³⁶

Answer: I have often heard this by Reformed thinkers as well. I think it was Cornelius van Til who said, "It does no good to place the life-giving potion next to the casket." Right? The corpse can't get up and take it. As congenial as that analogy is, it is reasoning from an illustration that isn't in Scripture. The Scripture does present the Gospel as something to which unregenerate people can respond under the drawing and convicting power of the Holy Spirit. So when a person is said to be dead in trespasses and sins, that doesn't mean he is comatose, that his rational faculties have ceased to function or that he can't respond to the convicting and drawing of the Holy Spirit. It is wrong to impose an illustration or an analogy on Scripture without warrant, I think. So I would say that the Scripture does present the Gospel as something to which spiritually dead people – that is to say, people who are alienated from the life of God – can respond, either positively or negatively in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Question: This is just a comment. Again, an analogy is not an argument but it seems to me (I think this has been said before but) if election or predestination is purely individual and it's not, as a result of that, salvation is not offered to all people, I think we have a serious problem with Scripture and consistency. The analogy is this. In law you could write a will today and you could leave a gift to your grandchildren – even if you don't have any grandchildren. What you are doing is creating an open class and the membership is to be determined by later events. Then when you have grandchildren and you pass away, they each receive a gift. Fifty years from now your grandkids could say that you chose to give them a gift. So you have the corporate nature of the election process then you have the individual results. To carry the analogy one step further, your grandchildren, your heirs, could renounce the gift and say, "I don't want it." There is a legal doctrine that lets you do that. An heir can renounce a gift. So it seems to me that is an analogy that helps.

Answer: Yeah, that's a wonderful analogy for corporate election that you have given us. I would hold to a corporate doctrine of election end of story if it weren't for passages like Acts 13:47-48 where you do seem to have contemplated a kind of individual election that

³⁶ 10:05

presses me forward to go with a Molinist doctrine. I think the corporate doctrine is correct that we enunciated and for which you provided a wonderful illustration. But I would want to go further with the Molinist view in order to secure those passages in Scripture where it does seem to have an individual in mind, like Paul, for example, who says God set him apart before he was born and called him at the right time knowing, I think, that he would not be disobedient to the heavenly vision as he says to Agrippa but would respond positively.

Question: In the last class, right toward the end, we were talking about Congruism which I believe you support.

Answer: No, did you say that I support?

Followup: Is that correct?

Answer: No, it wouldn't be what I support. Congruism is a subset or a particular school of Molinism that comes very, very close to Calvinism. I was simply informing you about it without defending it. I am not saying it is false, but I haven't taken a position on that. Let me just reiterate what that is for those who don't recall from last time. Some followers of Molina after he was gone developed the idea called Congruism which says that for any possible creature, any possible person, that God might create, there is a congruent grace that God might offer to that person that is so apt, so suited, to that person that it would win a free affirmative response from that person.³⁷ So there is no person who is unsaveable; whom God cannot save. God knows the congruent grace that is so perfectly suited to any person he might create as to win that person's free response.

Followup: I guess what I am trying to understand is you talked about two options. Let's say there is a scale of Molinism between Congruism and maybe Neo-Molinism on one side or something like that. Where do you come down on the side of Molinism?

Answer: Well, these are issues on which I think it would be imprudent to be dogmatic. I think it is good to keep your options open. So I guess I would say I don't know if there is a congruent grace for every possible person. It seems to me that there are some possible persons who wouldn't be saved under any circumstances that God might place them in. They would just be so intransigent that they would separate themselves from God; they would reject God in any world in which God might create them. But, you could say that, no, there is a congruent grace for everybody and so there would be a feasible world that God might create in which a person is saved. But maybe that wouldn't be the same world in which somebody else was saved. Maybe they wouldn't be compossible together. Do you see what I mean? The world in which a grace is congruent for Joe might not be a world in which there is a congruent grace for Jim or Susie. So although there is a congruent grace for every possible person, that doesn't mean there is a feasible world available to God that involves this much salvation without some freely rejecting him and being lost. It may be that a world of universal salvation having a significant number of people in it isn't available to God. That is the idea. Again, I don't have any views on that except to say it is defensible and this can help to defuse any sort of objection to Christianity like this: if God is all-loving and all-powerful then why isn't everybody saved? He ought to be able to create a world in which everybody freely responds to his

³⁷ 15:08

grace and is saved. One can respond to that in the way that I just have, and thereby remove the teeth of the objection by showing a possible scenario in which God is all-powerful and all-loving and yet some people freely reject him and are lost.

Question: This might be redundant but the question is: could you please tell me the difference between a free agent – I hear scholars speak of the difference between a free agent – and free will.

Answer: I don't think that there is a difference.

Followup: You don't think there is?

Answer: No. Somebody who sees a difference between those two is defining his terms, I think, in an idiosyncratic way. You would need to ask that person, "How do you distinguish between that?" It would seem to me that a person endowed with free will is a free agent. Right? That's what a free agent is. It is someone who has free will.

Followup: If I told you that R. C. Sproul is the one that makes that distinction.

Answer: Ah-ha.

Followup: That is why I am asking.

Answer: Do you know how he . . .

Followup: No, I have not – that is why I am asking – I haven't researched it yet.

Answer: Here is what I am thinking.

Followup: I know he is a Calvinist.

Answer: The Calvinist – and he is a Calvinist – will sometimes say, "Yes, we are free in the sense that we are not coerced into doing what we do. We do it voluntarily." But they would say we don't have freedom of the will because what we will is determined by God. So they would say that freedom is compatible with determinism. Now, that sounds funny to . . .

Followup: I think that is a hard line, isn't it?

Answer: That's the typical Reformed view.³⁸

Followup: But I believe that the Bible teaches . . . well . . . my conclusion when I study the Bible is that you do not trump God's sovereignty. Your free will, my free will, if God has a plan and a purpose he is going to carry that out. If he makes promises and speaks his word and his word is truth and I stand in the way of bringing that about, God's sovereignty trumps my free will.

Answer: Yes. Now, with respect to God's promises, I certainly agree with that. But come back to the distinction that someone made a moment ago between God's absolute will and permissive will. It does seem to me that I think we want to say that God's absolute will is that everybody be saved. As a loving God, he wants everyone to be saved. He doesn't want anybody to go to hell. But I think human freedom trumps that.

Followup: I think that is just a picture, in my opinion; a picture of his compassion for

³⁸ 19:59

people. But I don't see God up in heaven wringing his hands saying, "Please be saved. Please be saved." I think he knows; the foreknowledge.

Answer: Oh, I agree with that! Certainly. That is not the issue. We all agree with foreknowledge. But if you don't think that God is pleading with people, read Ezekiel 38 where God says, "Why will you die? I have no pleasure in the death of anyone says the LORD, God. Turn back! Turn back from your wicked ways. Why will you die?" He's pleading with Israel to turn to him, lest he destroy them. And he says, "I don't want to destroy you. I don't take any pleasure in the death of the wicked. But that the wicked turn from his way and live." If you don't think God pleads with people, I don't know how you can make sense of Ezekial 38.

Followup: I don't have a problem with that. I think he does plead. I think he does do that. But I think ultimately he knows who is going to choose him and who is not.

Answer: Right, we all agree with that.

Followup: Ultimately, I don't see him pleading in that sense; that he doesn't know.

Answer: No, no. Nobody said that, except for the open theist that was mentioned obliquely here a moment ago. But the Arminian, the Molinist, the Calvinist, all think that from the foundation of the world, God knew who would be saved and who would be lost. So it is all within his sovereign plan as it unfolds. We've emphasized that this happens according to his foreknowledge. But the question is the one that someone raised: do you think that God has an absolute, salvific will that everyone be saved, or is his will really, "No, I really want to send some people to hell and save others?"

Followup: I don't think that has to be contradictory. I don't get it. I don't get it. Because there is so many Scriptures in the Bible that say that God . . . in John when Jesus was praying in the garden, he was praying for those who would be saved. He wasn't praying for the people he knew would never be saved. He was specifically praying for those people who he knew would be saved and then there is other Scriptures that talk about being molded. God creates some out of clay to be molded for divine salvation and others not.

Answer: Yes, well, we talked about that. That is Romans 9 where it says that God determines who will be saved and who will not be saved and no one has the right to gainsay God's choice. But what we suggested there is that those whom God has chosen to save sovereignly is those who have faith in Christ Jesus. It is like that promulgator of his will – he has the right to will his inheritance to whomever he wants. It is his to dispose of as he wills. But he has willed to guarantee it or bequeath it to his grandchildren who don't even exist yet, but they have the ability to accept it once they are born or to reject it. So I think that the concerns that you have are concerns that are shared by the Arminian, the Molinist, and don't serve to motivate a Calvinistic view.

Mystical Union

Having said that, let us now turn to the doctrine of the mystical union of the believer with

Christ.³⁹

Definition

In speaking of our mystical union with Christ we are not talking about the total absorption of the believer into deity as you have, for example, in Hinduism where the individual returns like a drop of water to the ocean and is reabsorbed into The All, into The Totality of Being, and really ceases to exist as an individual entity. We are not talking about that kind of mystical union that you have in pantheism. Rather, what we are talking about here is the wonder of a personal relationship and identification of the regenerate believer with Jesus Christ. It is rather like the marriage relationship that Paul describes in Ephesians 5 where he says that the man and the woman become one flesh. Yet, they still exist as two individual persons. It is not as though they merge into one person. They are two distinct persons but they are so closely united together that they become identified with one another as a unit.

I think this notion of our union with Christ is the primary meaning of the phrase “having a personal relationship with God.” When we say that coming to know Christ brings you into a personal relationship with God, we are not speaking primarily of the subjective experience of fellowship with God. Some people who don’t have that sort of intimate fellowship with God or who have their Christian experience come and go as emotions and times change will sometimes say, “Where is this personal relationship with God that I am suppose to have in becoming a Christian?” What they fail to understand is that this personal relationship with God is not primarily a subjective experience. It is primarily an objective relationship into which you come and in which you stand whereby you are identified with Christ regardless of the shifting sands of experience and emotion. It is primarily an objective reality, not a subjective experience.

In both the Gospels and in Paul’s epistles we have a great deal of discussion of salvation consisting in our union with Christ. As regenerate Christians we are identified with Christ.

Gospels

Look first at the Gospels. Let’s turn to the Gospel of John 15:1-8 where Jesus gives the parable of the vine and its branches. He says,

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

³⁹ 25:02

Here Jesus describes the relationship between himself and his disciples as the relationship between a vine and its branches.⁴⁰ There is this identification between the two and a deep union between the two. He says “abide in me and I in you.” It is the one who is abiding in Christ and Christ then abiding in him who is united with and identified with Christ and therefore is a fruitful disciple of Christ. So in the parable of the vine and the branches I think we see this close identification or union that the believer has with Christ. Not a union that obliterates our individuality but one that unites us intimately with Christ and he with us so that we become fruitful.

Another example would be over in John 17:20-23. This is the high priestly prayer of Jesus that was referred to a minute ago.

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.

Now, many times this passage is appealed to as teaching the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. Christ is praying that his followers would be so united, so unified together, that the world would see that they are indeed followers of Christ. But even more fundamentally, this is a prayer for unity of the believer with God the Father and God the Son. Verse 21 says, “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us.” So the fundamental union here is not the union among believers horizontally so to speak, it is that vertical union of the believer with God the Father and God the Son. As the Father is in the Son and the Son is in us, we are then in God the Father and in God the Son. There is a unity between the believer and the Godhead that comes through knowing Christ.

Finally, Luke 10:16. Jesus tells his disciple, “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” Here again you see that unity between the believer with Jesus and then Jesus with the Father. So the person who rejects the preaching of the disciples is said to reject Christ. It is not just the disciples he rejects; he rejects Christ because Christ is so intimately unified with his disciples. And he who rejects Christ rejects God because Christ is intimately one with God. So in this passage as well I think you see the kind of mystical union between the believer and Christ and the Father as we are identified with him and personally related to him.

In the Gospels, there are many different examples of this sort of union. For example, Jesus says in the Gospels, “I am the light of the world.” But then he also says to the disciples, “You are the light of the world.” They are the light of the world insofar as they are united with Christ who is the light of the world.⁴¹ So they can also be said to be the light of the world. We’ve already seen the parable of the vine and its branches.⁴² The vine

⁴⁰ 30:12

⁴¹ cf. John 8:12; Matthew 5:14-16

⁴² 35:01

isn't something that is distinct from or devoid of the branches. The branches are part of the vine. They are unified and identified with the vine. Also, the example that we just saw in Luke 10: how people treat Christians is how they treat Christ. So Jesus says that even someone who gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in my name gives it unto me. He gives it to Christ insofar as he ministers to Christ's children. So there are these examples of this close, close identification in the Gospels that the believer has with Jesus Christ as we abide in Christ and he abides in us.

Paul

In the Pauline epistles, this notion of union with Christ becomes a central theme. Paul uses the expression "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus" one hundred and sixty four times in his epistles. And it is a marvelous Bible study to look at all that we have "in Christ" according to Paul. Insofar as we are in Christ we are heirs to an incredible number of blessings and privileges. For example:

1. *In Christ we are said to be chosen.* Ephesians 1:4, Paul says, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." So in Christ we are chosen.
2. *In Christ we are called.* 1 Corinthians 7:22, Paul says, "For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ." Calling, regardless of your circumstances, is said to be in the Lord or in Christ insofar as you are in Christ you are called.
3. *We are foreordained or predestined in Christ.* Ephesians 1:11-12, "In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined [or foreordained] and appointed to live for the praise of his glory." So we are predestined or foreordained in Christ.
4. *We are created to good works in Christ.* Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."
5. *In Christ we are sealed.* Ephesians 1:13-14,

In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Here he says in Christ you are sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of inheritance.

6. *In Christ we are justified.* Galatians 2:17. Paul is speaking here in the context of being justified by faith in Christ rather than by works of the law and he says, "But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not!" The phrase I wanted to focus on here is that phrase "justified in Christ." It is in Christ that we have justification.⁴³

7. Similarly, *as we are in Christ, we are sanctified.* 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul says, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints

⁴³ 40:00

together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” Again, the key phrase in this verse is sanctified in Christ Jesus.

8. *We are crucified with Christ.* Romans 6:1-11,

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Here Paul explains that it is in Christ we are crucified with Christ. We are united with him in his death in dying to our old sin nature so that we might live in resurrection life, a sanctified life pleasing to God.

Well, we will continue with the list next time. But just to summarize, look at already what the regenerate believer has insofar as we are in Christ. In Christ we are chosen, called, foreordained, created to good works, sealed with the Holy Spirit, justified, sanctified, and co-crucified with Christ. There is more to come, and we'll look at that next time.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Total Running Time: 43:20 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 6

The Mystical Union of the Believer with Christ, Part 2

We've been thinking about the mystical union between Christ and his church – the individual, regenerate believer and Jesus Christ and the Godhead. Last time we saw that the expression “in Christ” or “in him” is a favorite of Paul's; some 164 times Paul uses this expression to describe all that we are and have in Christ. We saw last time that in Christ we are chosen, called, foreordained or predestined, created to good works, sealed by the Holy Spirit, justified, sanctified, co-crucified with Christ.

Let's continue now that list by looking at some of the other blessings that we have as we are united with Christ.

9. *We have adoption as sons and heirs of God.* Galatians 3:16, 26-27, 29. Paul says,

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many; but, referring to one, “And to your offspring,” which is Christ.

[That is to say, the promises are made primarily to Christ as the offspring of Abraham. But then, in verse 26, he says,]

. . . for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. . . . And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

So the promise is primarily to Abraham's offspring which Paul says is Christ, but insofar as we are united with Christ, we also are Abraham's offspring and therefore heirs of this promise of God. This is a wonderful illustration of the union that we have with Christ and, in virtue of that union, sharing in a promise made, according to Paul, first and foremost to Jesus Christ.

10. *We are one body in Christ.* Galatians 3:28, the verse that I just skipped. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” All these ethnic and gender and other barriers are dissolved in Christ. We are one body in Christ. Though we have our differences, nevertheless there is this deeper commonality that we all share in virtue of being members of the one body of Christ.

11. *In Christ we have redemption.* Romans 3:24. Paul says, “They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” So insofar as we are in Christ, we have redemption from our sins. We are saved from our sins and no longer bear them.

12. Similarly, *in Christ we have eternal life.* That is stated in Romans 6:23. Paul says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So those who are in Christ have eternal life.

13. *We have forgiveness in Christ.* Ephesians 1:7: “In him [that is, in Christ] we have

redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses . . .” So we have forgiveness of our sins in Christ.⁴⁵

14. *As we are in Christ we are a new creation.* 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes, “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” When a person is in Christ, the old life – the old self – is done away with. It is forgiven, it is abolished, and we now become new creations insofar as we are in Christ and united with him.

15. *In Christ we have liberty.* Galatians 2:4. Here Paul, speaking of these Judaizers that were threatening the freedom of the Gospel, says, “. . . because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage . . .” and then the sentence goes on. These Judaizers wanted to deny the liberty which Christians enjoy from all of the demands of the Jewish law, such as circumcision and so forth. Instead, Paul says in Christ we have freedom. We have liberty from the demands of the law.

16. *In summary, we have all of these spiritual blessings in Christ.* Ephesians 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” So, as we are united with Christ, we enjoy this multitude of spiritual blessings in virtue of being united with him.

17. The last one I wanted to share is that *as we are in Christ, we always have triumph.* 2 Corinthians 2:14, insofar as we are united with Christ, we always have triumph. Paul says, “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.” This doesn’t mean that our lives are going to be trouble-free and that we won’t be subject to failure and defeat in earthly things. This is, after all, written by a man who suffered enormous adversity because of his commitment to Christ and who was finally martyred for his faith. Yet, when Paul says, “Christ always leads us in triumph” what he is assuring us of is that insofar as we are abiding in Christ and walking in his will, even the adversities and the defeats and the failures of life ultimately redound to the purposes of the triumph of God’s Kingdom. So he can say “through us he spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere.” That is a tremendous comfort and encouragement, as we go through the ups and downs of life, to know that, even in those valleys, even in those times of failure and hardship, if we are abiding in Christ we have triumph in him as we follow his will and his leading.

To sum up, just look at the list of things that Paul says we have in Christ. In Christ we are chosen, called, predestined, created to good works, sealed with the Holy Spirit, justified, sanctified, crucified with Christ, adopted as sons and heirs of God, one body in Christ, we have redemption from our sins, eternal life, forgiveness, we are a new creation in Christ, we are set at liberty, we have all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, and we are always led in triumph. What a tremendous encouragement this is for us as Christians of all that we have insofar as we are united with Christ.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ 5:11

⁴⁶ 10:11

Metaphors

There are a couple of key metaphors in the New Testament for this mystical union with Christ that I want to hone in on. The first of these is the relationship between a bride and a groom, or a husband and a wife. As they are united in marriage, they are a symbol of the union of Christ with his church, with his people. Paul explains this in Ephesians 5:21-35. Paul writes,

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. [then, quoting from Genesis] “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” [Paul says, commenting on this Scripture] This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Now, this verse in its original context referred to the union of the man and his wife in sexual intercourse as they become one flesh in the conjugal act of marriage. But Paul says, in a deeper sense, this verse refers to the union between Christ and his church. The man and the wife become one flesh, and this is a symbol or representation of the intimate, personal union of Christ with his church. So the marriage relationship is a living parable, as it were, of this mystical union that is the subject of this lesson. That is why, I think, the marriage relationship is so sacred to God and must not be violated. This is why adultery or homosexual activity is so abhorrent to God. Because it is a profaning of this symbol of the union of Christ and his church.

A good example of this is found in 1 Corinthians 6:15-20. Here Paul talks about the importance of chastity in the marriage relationship as well as for those who are single. In verse 15 of 1 Corinthians 6, Paul says,

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? [There is that union that we have with Christ. Your bodies are members of Christ.] Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, [quoting that same passage from Genesis] “The two shall become one flesh.” But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.⁴⁷ Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You

⁴⁷ 15:06

are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

So we see here in Paul's commands for observing chastity, both within marriage as well as for single people, the importance of this union with Christ and not allowing that to be profaned in any way by making the members of Christ illicitly members of some union physically other than the union between a man and his wife. So the marriage relationship is a living picture of this mystical union. It is no wonder, I think, that our Catholic friends see marriage as a sacrament. You can see why it would be regarded in that way in the sense that it pictures the union of Christ and his church.

The second metaphor that we find in the New Testament that also expresses the intimate union of the believer with Christ – and we've already alluded to it – is the analogy of the body with its many members or parts. The way the many parts of the body go to make up one living functioning organism and are not independent of one another.

Paul also speaks to this in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. He says here,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

So we are Christ's body. Just as the body has all of these interdependent parts that function for the whole and each of which is important for the proper functioning of the body, so we, too, make up this one body in Christ and need to care for one another in order that the body of Christ not be impaired.

Paul also speaks to this analogy in his epistle to the Ephesians 3:4-6, 4:4-16.⁴⁸

When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which

⁴⁸ 19:53

was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; [What is that mystery that is now revealed? Well, he says:] that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

This is what we saw in Romans 9, you'll remember, that God has sovereignly elected to save all those who place their faith in Christ Jesus whether Jew or Gentile. Now the Gentiles are also members of the same body with Jewish believers and therefore partakers of the promises in Christ Jesus because they, too, are united with him in Christ.

Then over in chapter 4 verses 4-16 he goes on to say,

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”

(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

Here, now, Christ is said to be the head of this body of which we are members. As we are in him, submitted to him, and exercising our spiritual gifts in the context of the local body – which for us means here at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church⁴⁹ – then the body of Christ locally will be healthy and will build itself up and will grow up into maturity. Notice that maturity is characterized by a stability and maturity that is not buffeted and carried about by every wind of doctrine. That emphasizes the importance of a class like this – in learning Christian doctrine as part of maturity in Christ.

In the analogy of the body with its many members, we have another symbol of our union with Christ and the importance of exercising our spiritual gift in the context of the body so as to build up the body of Christ.

⁴⁹ Johnson Ferry Baptist Church is Dr. Craig's local church where he is teaching this class, and thus he is directly addressing the students in his classroom. Obviously, the reader's local body will be their own local church to which they are a member.

DISCUSSION

Question: Dr. Craig, I think that the love and submission that we see portrayed by Paul within the marriage relationship and also within the church – love and submission to Christ – is not some artificial construct but actually flows out of the Trinity itself – the Godhead. The love and submission – submission of the Son to the Father and the love of the Father for the Son and the Spirit – it is all a perfect unity.⁵⁰ I have been taught that that is the basis for the family, for the church, and the family and the church are not just some artificial constructs but they actually are a reflection of the nature of God. That is why they are so special to him.

Answer: I think that many feminists who object to Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 5 on submission of wives to the leadership of their husbands – they think that this implies inferiority. The example of the Trinity shows that that is not true because Christ – the second person of the Trinity – is fully equal to the Father in terms of the attributes of God: omnipotent, omnipresent, perfectly holy, omniscient, and all the rest. Yet, for the sake of the plan of salvation and for our redemption, he submits to, and does, the will of the Father. So there is no inferiority implied whatsoever in this economy of submission in order for the Father’s will to be done. So I do think you are right in saying that in the Trinity we have an example of this relationship between husbands and wives that helps to put it in its proper perspective and doesn’t imply a kind of domineering superiority on the part of the husband, but a loving care in the way that Christ cares for the church and the Father loves the Son.

Application

In conclusion, let me say a couple of words of application that this has for our lives. I think all of this is nicely summed up by Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:20. Paul says,

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I want to just read that one more time so that you can reflect on it, and ask yourself: can you put your name in there in the place of “I?”

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

This expresses the union between Christ and the believer so intimately that here Christ is described as living out his life through us as we abide in him and he abides in us.

This doctrine of the mystical union of the believer with Christ, I think, is tremendously encouraging.

1. It is a source of strength as we’ve seen as we go through the adversities and trials of

⁵⁰ 25:04

life. As we abide in Christ and he abides in us, we are like the branches of that vine which draw their life from the vine. As long as we are abiding in Christ we can be drawing upon that supernatural strength which is given to us through the indwelling Holy Spirit to get through the trials and adversities of life.

2. We've seen that it is a call to holy living. As we are united with Christ we are called to live out the holiness and sanctification that we properly have in Christ. In Christ, we are redeemed, forgiven, cleansed, we are a new creation in him, and we need to now live like that and to live holy lives separated from sin and do nothing that would rupture or profane this experiential union that we have to Christ.

3. It is a summons to closer fellowship with Christ. Insofar as we are in Christ, this is not, as I said, something that is dependent upon our experience day to day. Our subjective experience will rise and fall, will wax and wane. And our union with Christ isn't dependent upon that experience. Nevertheless, insofar as Christ lives within us and we abide in him, I think this is a summons to work out in our experience what we really are in Christ and to draw close to him in prayer, in study of his Word, in fellowship, in worship, and so forth so as to try and actualize in our experience what we actually are in Christ.⁵¹

4. It is a source of security for us as believers. Insofar as we abide in Christ and he in us, we are eternally secure. We are redeemed, we are sealed, we are a new creation, justified, sanctified, and all the rest. So this is a call to stay close to Christ because that is where our security lies. For the believer who is in Christ, he will remain in Christ and nothing can snatch him out of God's hand.

I hope that you have been encouraged by this section of the Doctrine of Salvation. I think it is a tremendous encouragement as we reflect on all of these blessings that we have in Christ and to live our lives in light of them.⁵²

⁵¹ 30:16

⁵² Total Running Time: 31:25 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 7

Regeneration (New Birth), Part 1

Regeneration (New Birth)

Definition

Today we start a new subsection on regeneration or the new birth. What do we mean when we talk about regeneration or the new birth? Regeneration can be defined as *the act of the Holy Spirit whereby one becomes spiritually alive and a child of God.*

The new birth is referred to in the New Testament in a couple of places. For example, John 1:12-13 would be an important passage where John says,

But to all who received him [that is, Christ], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Here John refers to that supernatural birth whereby one becomes God's child.

And as you are probably aware over in John 3 we have a long discourse upon the new birth between Jesus and Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Let's turn to John 3 and read John 3:1ff.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can this be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Here Jesus describes to Nicodemus a birth that is not fleshly but rather spiritual, wrought by the Holy Spirit and in virtue of which one comes into the Kingdom of God. Indeed, Jesus says you cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless you have this spiritual new birth.

The theological term for the new birth is *regeneration*. It means literally to be born again; not generated once but regenerated – reborn. So the definition of regeneration then is – this is an act of the Holy Spirit whereby you become spiritual alive and a child of God.

Characterization

How can we characterize this new birth or regeneration that is wrought by the Holy Spirit?

1. *In virtue of the new birth, you become a new creation.* 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes, “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” So insofar as we are united with Christ through the new birth, through regeneration, we become a new creation.⁵³ That doesn’t mean that you are not identical to the person that you were prior to your rebirth. You are the same person in terms of numerical identity. That is why you can say, “I once was lost but now am found. Was blind but now I see.” It is the same person but that person was once unregenerate and now has become regenerate in light of the new birth. Therefore, everything is new for that person. The slate has been wiped clean. You start over. Your sins are forgiven. You are freed from them. You now begin a new life. So this is a tremendous truth that we Christians ought to relish and rejoice in. It is not just that God has forgiven you but that everything starts over for you. The slate has been wiped clean and now you begin to write a new chapter in your life. So when you are born again, when you move from being an unregenerate person to a regenerate Christian, everything starts over and you are a new creation in Christ.

2. *This involves an immediate relationship with Christ and with God.* 1 Peter 1:3-5, Peter says,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Here Peter says that it is by God’s mercy that we have been born anew into this living hope in which we stand and to the inheritance in heaven that we have awaiting for us. So when we are born again by the Holy Spirit, we are placed into now this relationship with God which gives us a vital hope for the future.

3. *This relationship is eternal.* That is the third point I want to make about it. Notice what Peter says about it. “You have been born anew to a living hope and to an inheritance which his imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” Then he says you will be kept by God’s power until you take hold of this inheritance which is reserved in heaven for you. This is not a relationship that is temporary. It is not one that begins when you die. It begins right now. You have been born anew, you are a new creation, and you now enjoy this eternal relationship with God that will last forever. So back in the Gospel of John, if we look at John 3 again, verse 16 – the passage just following the passage we read – John goes on to comment, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that

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whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” So as a result of the new birth, you are brought into a relationship with God which gives you everlasting life.

4. In this new creation, in this new relationship with God, *we have freedom from sin*. 1 John 1:7-9, John says,

... if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So in Christ united with him, we have access to God’s forgiveness.⁵⁴ God doesn’t simply forgive all your past sins, but as we walk in the light – as we walk with him – when we stumble we come to God in confession and he is faithful and will forgive our sins and cleanse us. So we need to practice in the Christian life this continual coming before God of confession, repentance, and then accepting his cleansing and forgiving in our lives. We need to keep short accounts with God. Don’t allow your sins to pile up and for you to walk away from him. But as soon as you become aware of something that is wrong in your life, confess it immediately and claim his forgiveness and his cleansing.

John goes on to say in chapter 3 verse 9 that having become regenerate Christians we don’t need to keep on sinning. We are freed from the bondage to sin. We are free now not to practice sin. In chapter 3 verses 6-9 he says,

No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous. He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God commits sin; for God’s nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.

Now does John mean there that once you are born of God – once you are a regenerate Christian – you will live a sinless life? Evidently not! He already said back in chapter 1 that if we say we have no sin, we lie and the truth is not in us. He says therefore you need to confess your sins and claim it. Rather the present tense of the verbs here I think means that no one can live a lifestyle of sin. No one who is born of God goes on just repeatedly committing sin, living in a life of sin. Practicing sin perhaps would be a way of translating this. No one who is born of God practices sin because God’s nature abides in him, and therefore he is regenerate and he will be living a new life free from the bondage of sin. That doesn’t mean that he will never fail, but when he does fall he can bring that to God in confession and be cleansed again.

So once a person is a regenerate Christian, there should be evidence of this in a change of lifestyle. I think what John is excluding here would be someone who says, “Oh, yes, I went forward at an altar call at my church when I was eight-years old” and then he’s lived like the devil ever since then. I think John would say that person has no right to think that he is a regenerate Christian. He can have no assurance of the forgiveness of his sins. It is not enough just to have made a confession at some point earlier in your life if it hasn’t

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wrought any effect in your life. A person who is truly born of God is now indwelt with the divine nature and therefore this ought to result in a difference – a freedom from the bondage of sin in that person’s life.

Also look at 2 Corinthians 5:21 in this same connection – a passage that we read earlier. This is right after the passage where he talks about being a new creation in Christ. He says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” In Christ, we acquire the divine righteousness and are free from sin.

Also in the eighteenth verse he says, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.⁵⁵

So as born again Christians we are not in bondage to sin, we have the freedom now to live lives that are free of sin even if on occasion we do stumble and fall. And when we do, then we need to practice confession to claim God’s cleansing and forgiveness.

5. Finally, *this new birth is available to anyone*. John 3:3. Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This is available to anyone who will come to Christ, be born anew, and then that will give him membership into God’s Kingdom.

DISCUSSION

Question: I was wondering about the verse in 1 John 5, how it talks about if we ask for forgiveness, he is faithful to forgive our sins. How do we connect this idea of continual requests for forgiveness with the idea that is more popularly taught in church that once you request forgiveness from Christ he forgives all your sins – your past, your present, and your future?

Answer: Do you understand the question he is asking? And it is a difficult one. He is saying when you become a Christian God forgives not only your past sins, and your present sin, but your future sin. I think that is a little strange. I know that is often said popularly, but if you think about it – how can a sin be forgiven that you have not committed? Unless you are a tenseless theorist of time – right? *[laughter]* – and you believe that you are up there in the future and those sins are committed. (I’m thinking of this because I just taught this class on it.) If you think that temporal becoming is real and the future is unreal, that it doesn’t exist, then there isn’t any such sin. So how could it be forgiven? I think that what the person is trying to express who says that is that Christ’s death is sufficient to cover all your sins past, present, and future. That atoning death is a sufficient sacrifice to cover every sin. That is why when you commit more sins or new sins there doesn’t need to be an additional sacrifice. You don’t need to have Christ die again or offer something else. The one sacrifice is good for all time. But it does seem to me that John is saying we need to appropriate that sacrificial death by coming to God, confessing our sins, and asking him to forgive us when we commit them. So I think the

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truth in that statement would be that Christ's atoning death is sufficient to cover every sin past, present, and future. But that doesn't mean that when I come to Christ I am forgiven for sins I haven't committed.

Followup: So would you say that the result of what he's talking about – sort of the consequence of asking for forgiveness versus not asking for forgiveness for some given sin – is our salvation at that moment? For example, if I have asked for forgiveness for my sins up to now but some moment in the future I've sinned but don't ask for forgiveness . . .?

Answer: We'll talk more about this when we get to the doctrine of perseverance of the saints or what is popularly called eternal security. Do you lose your salvation every time you commit a sin, especially if you don't ask for forgiveness? Or are there certain kinds of sins that would separate you from salvation so that you would lose it but other sins would be overlooked or forgiven by God? We will talk about that more when we get to the doctrine of perseverance, but that is an excellent question.

Question: This also gets down to justification versus sanctification. Justification is the so-called "just as though you've never sinned." That covers every sin past, present, or future.⁵⁶ However, if you sinned, you don't lose your salvation according to my belief, but God may indeed withdraw his fellowship from you.

Answer: Certainly, that is true.

Followup: 1 John 1:9, in order to restore that fellowship, you must confess sins. That doesn't mean that you lose your salvation. Also, David with his great sin with Bathsheba, in Psalm 73 I think it was, he didn't say "Lord, restore my salvation;" he said, "Restore the joy of my salvation."

Answer: I think you are making a point that we can all agree on regardless of your views on perseverance, and that is unconfessed sin will interrupt your personal walk with God because you'll be outside of his will; you will be alienated from what he wants you to do. So certainly unconfessed sin in your life will have those kinds of practical consequences apart from these issues of salvation or damnation.

Question: I have always been a little bit disturbed by the practice of some – and I guess this goes back to the Jimmy Carter era at least – of referring to themselves as "born again Christians" as if there is sort of a super category of Christians or something. As I understand it, all true Christians are born again whether they self-identify that way or not. Is that right?

Answer: Yes, that is right. If you are not regenerate, if you have not been regenerated, you are not a Christian. It is through regeneration that one becomes spiritually alive to God and adopted as his child. So I think you are absolutely right. The question would be perhaps, "When does regeneration take place?" I think in evangelical circles we think of regeneration as a moment that occurs when, for example, you respond to an altar call or pray a prayer after hearing a presentation of the Gospel, whereas, for some of our more sacramental brethren, they will often identify regeneration as taking place in baptism, for example baptismal regeneration. It is in that context that you experience or undergo this

⁵⁶ 20:00

regeneration. So those issues would be disputed I think. Maybe that is what people like Carter meant when identifying themselves as a born again Christian. They wanted to associate themselves more with the evangelical wing. But every Christian has to be regenerate in order to be a genuine Christian. If you are not, you are just not a Christian.

Question: My question is the order you have in the outline. You've got regeneration before justification. We are going to talk about justification next. It seems to me you need that judicial declaration to take place before the regeneration actually occurs. Could you explain your reason for ordering it like that?

Answer: You know, that is interesting. I did not mean to have put any sort of theological significance into the order of the topics. What you have hit on here very interestingly enough is whether or not regeneration precedes a genuine faith in Christ. Those who are in the Reformed camp think, as we saw earlier, that regeneration is at least explanatorily prior to your exercise of faith in Christ. An unregenerate person cannot place faith in Christ. So there needs to be regeneration first. I didn't mean anything by the way in which I discussed these topics, particularly with regard to justification. So I am not implying anything there.

Followup: Does justification come logically prior to regeneration in your understanding?

Answer: I've not thought about that question, but it would seem to me just off the top of my head that they would be co-incident, they would be simultaneous. I would think that when you are regenerated you are declared righteous by God in this forensic sense that someone earlier was talking about.⁵⁷ I don't think that God would declare righteous someone who is still unregenerate. Similarly, I don't think you could be regenerate without also having this declaration of righteousness before God. So it would seem to me that these would be co-incident. The one is experiential and an actual change that takes place in you. Regeneration is an actual event that happens to you. You are recreated by God in a spiritual sense. You are revived through the Holy Spirit of God. Whereas, as we will see, I think justification is a forensic event, a matter of what God declares. He now declares you to be justified, to be righteous. But that doesn't mean that you are righteous in a kind of experiential sense. You are still a baby Christian still advancing toward righteousness. So I would see these as co-incident but almost two different orders of things. The one is experiential and involves an actual change as an event. The other is more forensic and, if you will, abstract. That doesn't mean it's not real but it's a declared righteousness. We will talk more about that when we get to justification.

Question: I would take issue with this not knowing or not having forgiveness for future sins when we become born again or saved or regenerated because if God knows how we are going to respond to the Gospel, he knows the sins we are going to do. Example would be Peter denying Christ three times, and the subsequent forgiveness was applied.

Answer: Well, certainly we all want to affirm that God foreknows the sins that you will commit. That is certainly true. But I guess I would question, "Can you be guilty for a sin that you haven't committed?" Granted, you are going to commit it. Granted that. Then you will be guilty when you commit it. We will agree on that. But can you actually be really guilty for something you haven't done? For me, that is hard to see. So that was

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why I answered as I did.

Question: Addressing the issue of a lot of these things, the Bible states a lot of different conditions for salvation but in one sense the simplest and easiest to understand is that if you simply believe then at that moment, if you simply believe that Jesus died for your sins, then that moment the guilt is lifted off and you have at that moment access of the Spirit. You don't have to tell him or you don't have to tend to anything else. Now you have of his Spirit again because of that. Therefore, by definition, you are his child. The working out, there are many things – you say you have Lordship, or you draw back into perdition and stuff like that. But salvation – remember there is no magic when he saves us. Robots going into heaven instead of us. All it is is by simple belief in what he did, now you have of his Spirit again and you are born again of a lively hope now. Because your hope was waning. You wouldn't even turn to him until he showed you the law that you needed. Anyway, that's the point. Everything else follows from that.

Answer: I am sure you would agree, I hope, that it is not just a matter of having an intellectual belief *that* Christ died for my sins, but it is belief *in* him; it is placing your trust and faith *in* him as Savior.

Followup: Exactly. That is what trust is. I'm saying there are many ways that states it. In fact it even says if you just cry out to him, that's enough because it will lead to that. So it is the only thing he did for us – he lifted off the guilt. Now we can have fellowship with him again and truly fall in love with him. He's our Lord. You have a new hope so you do not have to live the old life of sin; you can live his life of fullness. It's just joy. It's a blessing.

Question: I think we think of sin as a behavior or an act but Jesus talks about regeneration in the beatitudes – it's in our attitude.⁵⁸ So when we repent, some people can repent on the act of wrong doing but God really intended for us to repent in our attitude. Our attitude is that in line with what Jesus proclaimed – how God will bless us if we align our attitude accordingly. So when we talk about forgiving future sin or justification, that means when our attitude is turned around then that means God already saw that our action will turn around and if we stumble he'll just wash off our feet and get going again.

Answer: Alright. Certainly, sin involves more than just commission of actions. It involves mental attitudes as well, like covetousness, self-centeredness, a cold heart, lack of compassion, and so forth. But I think the relevant question that was raised was: are you guilty of those bad attitudes before you have them, and does God forgive those mental sins before you commit them? I was suggesting that we still need to practice confession.

Followup: That is why confession is the key because it is talking about our attitude. It is turning our attitude around.

Answer: Ah. OK, that is certainly true, isn't it? That is involved in confession, isn't it? Having contrition for what you've done, resolving to repent, and turn around. All of those things are involved in genuine confession.

Followup: A lot of times a person repents their actions and yet their attitude is maintained to be the same which is not . . . you know, they are still not being justified.

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Answer: Right, that would be incomplete repentance, wouldn't it?

Question: What if I die before I have a chance to confess, and sin is abhorrent to God – I'm not saved anymore. Do I need to have a priest with me all the time so I confess to him? Of course not. But it really sounds like, unless there is one crucifixion and that covers all sins, it sounds like we are re-crucifying Christ and we have to re-get saved again over and over again every day, every hour, every minute for those sins we commit intentionally or unintentionally. There is a vortex here that I feel we are going down.

Answer: I didn't mean to give that impression. What I said in answer to that was we'll talk about that later when we get to the perseverance of the saints. That is what you are asking about – perseverance, or eternal security as it is sometimes called. I haven't said anything about that at this point. The only thing that I said was that it did seem to me that, as Christians, when we go to God and confess our sins then he does forgive us at that point and that we shouldn't think that he has already forgiven sins that we haven't committed. That was the only point I was making, and not making a judgment about perseverance and things of that sort.

Followup: Is that like a vaccination? I'm going to run into some germs and I'm forgiven for those sins, you know? If I have to go through the whole process again, that doesn't seem right to me. I don't know.

Answer: You do, though, accept that you need to practice confession, right? You can't just kind of go along sinning and say, "Oh, well, I'm already forgiven for all of these." You do need to say what John says here about confess our sins so that he'll cleanse us and forgive us.

Followup: And be fruitful. Again, it is back to the sanctification versus justification. I think the sanctification is one time, once and for all, all sins. If you are truly a Christian, all of your sins are forgiven, past, present, and future. And, yes, it is difficult for God to forgive future sins that you do, but I think he can do that.⁵⁹

Answer: OK. Alright.

Question: In terms of future sins, future tensed sins, even though one has not yet committed the sin, doesn't the foreknowledge and middle knowledge of God enter into this in that he knows what we will do in the future? Therefore, he made provision. We do need to confess, that is on our part. But on his part he knows already what we are going to do in the future and he's made provision for it.

Answer: Yes. And I suggested that the provision of Christ is sufficient for every sin we could commit. But raising middle knowledge maybe helps to raise an illustration of the problem I am saying. If I had been born in Nazi Germany, I would very likely have become a member of the Hitler Youth and been a Nazi and been in the German army and so forth. Right? That is very likely that if I had been born in Nazi Germany I would have committed all sorts of atrocious sins. Am I therefore guilty of those? Does God judge me because that is what I would have been even though I never had been? Well, I don't think so. I never have committed those sins so I'm not guilty of them even if it was true that I would have done that. Similarly, with regard to future sins. What I am saying is that you

⁵⁹ 35:01

are not guilty of them if you have not committed them. The future is unreal and therefore you can't be guilty for something you haven't done. Therefore, you can't be forgiven for something you are not guilty of. But provision can be made by God knowing that you will commit those sins and will turn to him and he will forgive you on the basis of the all sufficiency of Christ's death. So think about that analogy between these sins that you would have done had you been in different circumstances but you haven't done and sins that you will do but haven't yet done.

Question: In Romans 7:17, beginning verse 14 through about 20, I think it pretty much covers this subject and explains it pretty clearly. In verse 17 in particular, "So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me." You had to read verse 16 to put it into shape, to set it up. Actually you had to start reading at about 14 to really get it [laughter].

Answer: Alright, what's the point you want to make regarding this passage?

Followup: It is like sin is not me. When I sin, after I am justified, it is not me. It is the flesh. Do you understand? I mean, read it – it is just as clear as it can be. To me it is. It is like the flesh in me is what's sinning. I don't want to sin, but I am going to sin. I mean, it is just like when you are saved or justified and regenerated, that is something else. That is not the flesh. That's the soul in you, the inner-you. Does that not say that? Just as clear as it can be.

Answer: Let me see if this is what you agree with. When a person is regenerate, he's a new creation before God. That person's desire will be to live a pure and holy and sinless life before God. That is his desire.

Followup: Which is separated from the flesh.

Answer: But he still got that old sin nature. That's called the flesh. That doesn't mean the body. That doesn't mean the physical body. That means the old fallen sinful self. It is still there, still has power, and sometimes that will drag you down to make you do things that you don't really want to do.⁶⁰ But when you yield to the flesh and you do these sinful things, it is you that does them, right? That is why you are responsible. You can't say, "The devil made me do it." You have got to say, "I did it. I'm sorry, Lord. Forgive me. I confess."

Followup: I think when you sin I think you know it then and "whoa is me."

Answer: Right! It's me. Yes.

Followup: I might have lied. I messed up. I'm not living to the mark.

Answer: Right. And that is the need for confession.

Followup: When you've realized it, you've confessed it.

Answer: OK, I think we agree on that.

Alright, we are out of time. What we will do next time is talk about what regeneration is

⁶⁰ 40:00

not and then what the process of regeneration is like.⁶¹

⁶¹ Total Running Time: 41:11 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 8

Regeneration (New Birth), Part 2

In our lesson, we've been talking about the doctrine of regeneration, or what is popularly called the new birth. Last time we saw what was involved in the nature of regeneration. Today we want to wrap this up, and then turn to the subject of justification.

Let's turn to John chapter 3, the classic New Testament passage on the new birth – Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus. I want to say a few words about what the new birth is *not*, based upon this passage.

First, it's clear that *the new birth is not a matter of religious heritage*. In verse 1 it tells us, "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." This man had a tremendous religious pedigree. He was a member of a religious order within Judaism that was extremely strict. Yet it was to this man that Jesus said, "You need to be born anew in order to see the Kingdom of God." So it is not enough just to have a denominational background or religious heritage in order to be a regenerate Christian.

By the same token, it is clear that *this is not something that is biologically inheritable or something that is a matter of one's family – from one's parents*. In verse 4, Nicodemus says, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Here, this is probably intended to be a pretty sarcastic comment. Nicodemus isn't serious, of course. He is really ridiculing what Jesus has said. Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." So this is a spiritual rebirth. It is not a matter of biology or family inheritance.

By the same token, *it is not a physical thing*. Notice that Jesus says, "That which is born of Spirit is spirit." It is your spirit which is regenerated, which is born anew, so that what was once dead is now alive and in fellowship and communion with God. So this is an inner spiritual quickening that enlivens the spiritual element in a person and puts him into a right relationship with God.

Also notice that *this is not something that is granted by human beings*. Jesus goes on to say in verses 7-8, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit." It is the Holy Spirit who bestows the new birth. It is not something that is granted by human beings; it is under the control of human beings anymore than the wind is. Rather, this is something that God does.

Finally, *it is not just a matter of right doctrine or head knowledge*. In verses 10-11 Jesus says, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony." Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel. He was trained in the Old Testament law. Yet, that isn't enough to ensure a genuine rebirth of the spirit and a right

relationship with God.

So this new birth – regeneration – is something that is not of religious heritage, it is not inheritable biologically or from one’s family, it is not a physical thing, it is not under human control (it can’t be bestowed by human beings, it’s got to be at the discretion of the Holy Spirit), and it is not a matter of simply knowing intellectually and believing intellectually right doctrine.⁶²

How It Occurs

So how does the new birth work? How does regeneration occur? How does one become born anew? Let’s look at a couple of passages that are relevant to this. John 1:12-13, just a couple of pages over from the dialogue with Nicodemus. Here John writes,

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Here is this spiritual rebirth that Jesus describes in the conversation with Nicodemus. It is not something that is physical, under human control; it is something that comes from God and it is given to everyone who receives Christ and who believes in his name.

Look over at Titus 3:3-7, Paul’s epistle to Titus. Titus 3:3-7 is a wonderful passage describing our salvation. Paul says,

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another;

[What a description of life as a non-believer! As someone who spent many of his teenage years as an unbeliever I can identify with this description of what it was like.]

but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure.

What do we learn from these two passages about the new birth and how one comes to be a regenerate Christian? First notice that it is open to all men. John says “to all who received him.” To everyone who believed in his name, he gave this privilege to become God’s children. So this is an open invitation to everyone.

And the first step to this would be *repentance*. In Titus, Paul talks about how we lived once under the slavery of passion and sin, malice and envy, hating others and hated by them. It is from this life of sin that one must turn. That is what repentance means. It means to turn your back on that life and turn to God for forgiveness and cleansing. So the first step toward being born again is repentance, turning away from the old life, and turning now to God.

⁶² 5:04

The next step is *placing one's faith in Christ*. John says in verse 12 of chapter 1, "To all who received him who believed in his name." So having repented of sin, one turns to God and places one's faith in Jesus Christ. It is not just enough to give intellectual ascent to Christian doctrines about Christ. It is not enough to believe *that* Jesus was the Son of God, *that* Jesus died on the cross for my sins, *that* God raised him from the dead. All of those things must be believed, true. But that is not sufficient for saving faith. Notice that it says here, "They believed in his name." It is not just a matter of believing propositional truths about Christ.⁶³ It is believing in him. It is trusting in him, committing your life to him. This is the full concept of saving faith. Not just intellectual ascent to doctrines about Christ, but trusting in him personally; placing your faith in him.

Notice that it says then that those who believed in his name "received Christ." And by that it means they welcomed him. They welcomed Christ as their savior and their Lord. By so doing, by placing one's faith in Christ, by believing in him and welcoming him into your life, you receive the Holy Spirit of Christ and are born again. Remember what Titus says. Turn back to Titus 3. He says, "He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit whom he poured out upon us richly." So when a person believes in Jesus Christ and welcomes him into his life, the Holy Spirit comes into that person and regenerates his spirit. That dead spirit that was previously darkened and alienated from God is now quickened and comes alive and comes into a relationship with God.

This may be a little bit confusing to some of you because we often hear about the need to receive Christ, rather than receive the Holy Spirit. But I think that the idiom, or the expression, of receiving Christ is just a way of saying what is technically receiving his Holy Spirit. Look at Romans 8:9-10. In Romans 8:9-10, we see that the Holy Spirit comes in the place of Christ while Christ is absent from this universe ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit who comes in the place of Christ and continues his ministry becomes so closely identified with Christ that he is referred to as Christ. Look at, again, Romans 8:9-10,

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness.

This is a description of the regenerate Christian – someone whose spirit is alive because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Notice how Paul refers to this Spirit. He first says "the Spirit of God" then "the Spirit of Christ" and then simply "Christ." The Holy Spirit is so closely identified with Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer, living within us and quickening our spirits, is referred to as Christ – Christ in you. So when you receive the Holy Spirit, you are so to speak receiving Christ because it is the Spirit of Christ which you receive.

When one does so, then one is born anew – one is regenerated – into a new living relationship with God. One becomes united with Christ, as we saw in our previous study about the mystical union, and heir to all of the promises that belong to those in Christ.

⁶³ 10:04

So this is a transformation that is available to anyone who will turn away from sin and repentance, turn to Christ in faith, believe in his name, and welcome him into that person's life, and thereby receive the Holy Spirit of Christ which will transform and regenerate you from the inside out and change your life.

Now, it may be the case that there is someone listening to my voice who has never come to know God in that way, who has never been born again. You are not sure if you are a regenerate Christian. So I want to just pause in the lesson now to give you an opportunity to make that sort of commitment.⁶⁴ There is no sort of recipe for doing this, but I think it is entirely appropriate to come to God in prayer and to talk to him about it and to ask him to come into your life, to give you the Holy Spirit, and to regenerate you. So what I'd like us to do is just take a moment to bow our heads, close our eyes, and have such a prayer of invitation for anyone who would like to pray it silently along with me. Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, I really need you. I recognize that I've made a mess of my life and that I need your forgiveness and cleansing. I confess my sins and I turn away from them to you. I believe that you died on the cross to forgive my sins and restore me to a right relationship with God and that you rose from the dead to prove who you were. Right now, in the best way I know how, I want to open the door to my life and to welcome you in. Come into my life. Forgive my sins. Cleanse me from all wrongdoing and quicken my spirit, Lord, that I might be born again to new life and to the relationship with God that I was intended to have. Right now, as an expression of my faith, I thank you for hearing and answering this prayer. Amen.

If anyone has prayed that prayer, then I can give you assurance that, based on Scripture, God has heard that prayer and he answers that prayer to come into your life. I would encourage you now to look for signs of that renewed spirit within you – of a renewal and a relationship with God that wasn't there before. The Bible says that when we become regenerate Christians, we are like infants and we need to be nourished by the milk of the Word which is the Bible. So you should begin to pray, to read the Bible on a regular basis, and to be nourished by that. So like a little baby, you don't arrive stillborn but you begin to grow and become stronger in your Christian life as you walk with him.

DISCUSSION

Question: We have had some discussions with my Catholic brother-in-law regarding the Nicodemus encounter. The Catholics seem to believe that when it says you must be born of water and of the spirit, they are talking about baptism – that Jesus was talking about baptism as the water birth. Is there any Scriptural basis to believe that? He really believes you can't be saved without being baptized.

Answer: It is not just Catholics, but generally people who have a sacramental view of baptism and the Lord's Supper will identify the moment of regeneration as being the moment at which one submits to water baptism. But I think it is very clear that there is such a thing in the New Testament as baptism in the Holy Spirit and water baptism. They are both referred to in the New Testament – being baptized in the Holy Spirit and being

⁶⁴ 15:07

baptized in water. A supportive verse for our Catholic friends would be from 1 Corinthians 12:13 where it says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” They might say, “Well, see that shows that Spirit baptism is coincident with water baptism.” Well, maybe. It doesn’t say that. What he refers to there is that it is by Spirit baptism that we are placed into the body of Christ. And when I read the book of Acts, I find that the relationship between Spirit baptism and water baptism is all over the place. There is no consistent pattern. Sometimes people get baptized in the Holy Spirit and then they are baptized in water. Other times they are baptized in water and then later they are baptized in the Holy Spirit after they have already been through water baptism. So I do not think that you can make a convincing case that regeneration always takes place, or even normally takes place, in the baptismal font.⁶⁵ Perhaps for some people it does, but it is not going through dunking in water or being sprinkled that makes you born again. It is Spirit baptism. It is the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit may do that coincidentally with water baptism for some people. I know one fellow who I think that happened to. I think he was baptized in the Holy Spirit when he submitted to water baptism. But I think for many others of us we have experienced Spirit baptism first in placing our faith in Christ sensing a new relationship with God, and then in obedience we followed him by being water baptized.

Followup: One more point I have in regard to that. If, as the Catholics believe, it is so important, why is there no reference in the New Testament of the disciples being baptized?

Answer: Well, we don’t know about whether or not the disciples were baptized prior to, or as inaugural to, Jesus’ own ministry. Jesus submitted to baptism, right? He went to John the Baptist. Jesus and his disciples were baptizing other people. People thought that in a sense he was almost competing with John the Baptist because he was baptizing more people than John was. It would be very surprising, I think, if Jesus’ own disciples weren’t baptized. It is not recorded, but if Jesus submitted to baptism, if they were baptizing other people, I think it would really be odd that Jesus wouldn’t baptize his own disciples.

But I do want to second, I think, what you are saying in terms of the relative unimportance of water baptism compared to Spirit baptism. What I would refer to is 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 where Paul is talking about all the factions in Corinth. He says,

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius; lest any one should say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any one else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel . . .

Now, clearly Paul there is thinking that the primary motivation is preaching the Gospel. He can’t even remember whether he baptized converts in Corinth. So it was obviously of secondary importance, I think, for Paul rather than thinking this is what you’ve got to do to get people into the Kingdom – you’ve got to baptize them. Baptism would be an act of obedience that represents in a sense the culmination of one’s conversion experience. We will talk about this more when we get to the Doctrine of the Church. Regeneration is that

⁶⁵ 20:10

inner act of God whereby we are born anew into a proper relationship with God. Conversion is the outward and psychological manifestation of that commitment. I think that baptism is the culminating act of one's conversion. It is the proclamation to the world that one is a disciple and follower of Jesus. So for the Christian who is regenerate but refuses to follow the Lord's instructions in baptism is someone living in disobedience. His conversion is in a real sense incomplete. I think that is why it is very important here as JFBC when the opportunity to be baptized is given that anyone who is a regenerate Christian avail himself of that and follow the Lord's instructions by submitting to water baptism as the culmination of his conversion to Christ. Good question.

Question: John 1:12 says this is not of the will of man. Does that mean that regeneration has nothing to do with the will of man?

Answer: That is a good question. I think our Reformed brethren would love that verse in the sense of saying that God and the Holy Spirit simply, like the wind blowing, selects whom he wills and it's wholly independent of one's will.⁶⁶ I don't think that is what it means. After all, it does say, "To those who received him, who believed in his name" he gave this privilege. But I think he means to say that the new birth is not something that is humanly wrought. The new birth is a supernatural act of God, not something that is wrought by human desire or will or flesh or striving. I think that is what the intention is.

Question: I wonder if you could speak to the relationship of the human spirit to this new spirit that we have as regenerate Christians. The human spirit – before I became a believer, is that what was dead in trespasses and sins and then when I was born again that human spirit became alive to God? Or is it the Holy Spirit now indwelling within us along side of our human spirit?

Answer: I would say yes to all of that. Paul says, "I was dead in trespasses and sins when I was unregenerate." But obviously I was physically alive. My body was alive. Mentally I was alive. My rational faculties were operating. But what was dead about me? It was my spirit. I had no relationship with God. Paul says, "I was estranged from God. I was alienated from God. Morally guilty before him and groping in darkness." So I take it that the human spirit (that dimension of the human personality that allows us to relate to God in a way, say, that animals cannot) was inoperative, was dead, apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes into a person, that dimension becomes alive again. It is born anew. It is regenerated. It is quickened so that now you are put into this relationship with God that you were meant to have. So there is now a living human spirit – that dimension or aspect to your person – but then you are also indwelt by the Holy Spirit as well. The Spirit of God lives in you and empowers you and directs you as you walk in the Spirit. We are to be filled with the Spirit. We are to walk in the Spirit, if you recall from our Doctrine of the Holy Spirit section. All that results from the Holy Spirit living within you.

Followup: It kind of sounded like when you were describing the human spirit that being dead its purpose is to relate to God. So it sounded like the human spirit before regeneration is non-functional. There is another point that I'm a little fuzzy on because, with the Olympics coming up, we always hear about the triumph of the human spirit. So

⁶⁶ 25:06

in the world's eyes, the human spirit is something in us that, like you said, animals do not have, that is functioning in terms of other humans. I wondered if would you speak to that?

Answer: Obviously, the New Testament isn't using that word in the way that people talk about the "Olympic spirit" or "school spirit" or "the American spirit" or things of that sort. Remember in his Thessalonian correspondence, Paul says, "May God sanctify you holy in body, and soul and spirit." That is to say, every dimension or aspect of the human person. I take it that the spirit there is that aspect of the human person that enables you to have a relationship with God. It is not like the Olympic spirit or school spirit. This is a uniquely divine, as it were, dimension of the human person in virtue of our being created in God's image. Remember the Scripture says that man is the image of God. Insofar as we are in God's image, we stand apart from the rest of creation. But because of the Fall – and I'm now recalling all of the things we've been studying the last several months – we find ourselves dead spiritually and in need of regeneration, of a new birth, to put us into a proper relationship with God.⁶⁷

Question: Let's talk about the signs of rebirth. In Romans, Paul talks about how when a child is born they have a lively hope. But then God gave us the law to point out our need for him, and the law took occasion and revived and condemned us. So we realized when we thought on things of trying to need to relate to God we were cut off, we had no hope. After you believe that Christ died for you and he loved for you, and removed the guilt, then now you are born again of a lively hope. When you think about those things, it is not like doing something in the physical world you didn't have hope. But when you tried to relate to God you were cut off before. But now because of that in 2 Peter I think it says we've been born again of lively hope. That is the earnest money of the transaction. So faith may be just enough hope.

Answer: Yes, this is in 1 Peter 1:3 where he says we have been "born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." So you are certainly right in saying that the Holy Spirit within us is a sort of down payment on our ultimate resurrection of the body. So Paul talks about having this treasure in earthen vessels. Our outer nature – our bodies – are wasting away, but our inner nature is being renewed everyday. That is the Spirit. We have a resurrected spirit, but not yet a resurrected body. That will come at the return of Christ when the dead are raised. Sometimes people will ask, "Why doesn't God heal amputees?" Well, he will – at the resurrection. But until then we have mortal, decaying bodies that are infirm and not completely healed or immortal. But someday this earthen vessel will be done away with and we will have a glorious resurrection body in which to live. But for the time being, we live in mortal, corrupted, fallen bodies but with a renewed and regenerate spirit within us. So this is the wonderful hope, I think, that each of us as Christians enjoys – we are regenerate, we are born again. This is a great truth and treasure that each one of us should constantly hold to and rejoice in – that we are born anew to this relationship with God that will last forever.

With that we will close. Next time we will turn to a discussion of justification and ask

⁶⁷ 30:05

what does it mean to be justified by God?⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Total Running Time: 33:18 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 9

Justification (Catholic View)

Justification

We have been studying the Doctrine of Salvation, and now we come to a new subsection within that doctrine on the doctrine of justification.

Definition

Justification may be defined as that judicial act of God's free mercy whereby he pronounces guiltless sinners condemned under the law, constitutes them as righteous once for all in the righteousness of Christ on the ground of his atoning work by grace through faith alone apart from works, and assures them of: a full pardon, acceptance in his sight, adoption as sons, heirs of eternal life, the present gift of the Holy Spirit, and enables them to perform good works.

That is a pithy definition.

Discussion of Terms

Let's talk about some of the terms that are involved in this definition.

The key term, of course, is the term "justification," or "to justify," which in the Greek is *dikaioó*. This means to put into a right relationship with God. Justification is that act of God whereby he puts us into a right relationship with him.

The traditional Protestant Reformation understanding of justification is that justification is a *forensic* term. That is to say, it is a judicial act of God. We are not made righteous in the sense that we suddenly become righteous people, but rather we are declared righteous, much as in a court of law the jury might declare a person not guilty.

Similarly, in justification God declares us *righteous* – to be justified by him – even if our immediate experience or moral character is not yet transformed by that new standing.

This forensic, or judicial, understanding of justification is based upon passages like Romans 4:2-8, 23-25. There Paul writes,

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. So also David pronounces a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

"Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin."

And then turning over to Romans 4:23-25: ⁶⁹

But the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

In Galatians 3, Paul gives a pithy summary of this same truth. Galatians 3:6, “Thus Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’” Notice the forensic language that is employed in this passage. It is not that Abraham was suddenly transformed into a righteous and moral man. Rather, it was because he had faith in God, because he believed God’s promises, his faith was reckoned to him, or another way of putting it is he was counted as righteousness to Abraham. So this is a declaration that Abraham is righteous on the basis of the exercise of his faith. His faith was reckoned, or accounted, by God as righteousness wholly apart from any works that he did. Similarly, Paul says “for us who believe” (that is to say, believe in Jesus Christ as Lord) “our faith will be reckoned as righteousness.” We similarly will be counted as righteous in view of our faith in Christ. Not because of any good works that we’ve done, but simply because we have placed our trust in him.

This forensic, or judicial, understanding of justification of the Protestant Reformers stands in contrast to the Catholic view of justification as well as to a very recent view called the New Perspective on Paul. Let’s talk first about the contrast with the traditional Catholic view of justification.

In the understanding of Catholic theology, justification is not simply a judicial declaration that one is forgiven and counted righteous. Rather, it is the actual imparting of moral righteousness to the believer. During the Council of Trent, which was held between 1546 to 1563, the Roman Catholic Church promulgated the doctrine that righteousness is something that is found in the believer – that God makes the believer righteous. This is in opposition to Luther who claimed that righteousness is something that is declared by God and is imputed to the believer.

In contrast to the Roman Catholic view, Luther’s view is that justification is a legal transaction that affects our status before God, but it is not a moral transformation. It is not a transformed character. Justification doesn’t make me into a morally good person. It simply declares that I am righteous before God. God puts us into a new relationship with himself. So, at Trent it is declared that the righteousness is intrinsic to me. It is not extrinsic; it is intrinsic to me. God makes me righteous. It is my righteousness that I possess. By contrast, on the Reformers’ view, righteousness is extrinsic, not intrinsic. It is the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to you. It is not your own righteousness that God produces. It is extrinsic in contrast to Trent which treats it as intrinsic.

Similarly, at Trent the believer is actually made righteous, not simply declared to be righteous whereas, for the Reformers, the believer is declared to be righteous by God on the basis of his faith.⁷⁰ This becomes, I think, very clear; the difference is that on the Roman Catholic view righteousness is *imparted* to the believer, whereas on the

⁶⁹ 5:00

⁷⁰ 10:02

Reformation view righteousness is *imputed* to the believer. On the Roman Catholic view righteousness is actually imparted to the believer – he becomes righteous – whereas on the Reformers’ view it is the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to the believer, legally to his account so to speak.

On the Roman Catholic view justification is thus both an event and a process. It begins with the first impartation of righteousness and then God imparts more and more righteousness. You become more and more justified before him as you increase in righteousness by receiving God’s grace through the sacraments provided by the church. By contrast, on the Reformers’ view justification is not a process. It is something that is declared by God and is complete and done with when a person turns to Christ in faith. He is declared righteous and his sins are forgiven. It is not a process that transpires over time.

So if we look at some of the statements from the Council of Trent, I think we can get a clear understanding of the Roman Catholic view. At the Council of Trent, they provide this brief description of the justification of the sinner and its mode in the state of grace. This is what the Council says,

In which words is given a brief description of the justification of the sinner, as being a translation from that state in which man is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

So justification is this translation out of this state of corruption and condemnation that we are in as a result of the Fall and it is into this state of grace.

In chapter 7, the Council goes on to explain in what the justification of the sinner consists. It says,

This disposition or preparation [and that is the preparation of the human will which is disposed to place its faith in Christ. Once the human will is prepared by God’s prevenient grace to respond, it says this,] is followed by justification itself, which is not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just and from being an enemy becomes a friend, that he may be an heir according to hope of life everlasting.

So you can see that justification involves the sanctification of the inner man through God’s grace. It goes on to say,

. . . the single formal cause is the justice of God [or the righteousness of God], not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which He makes us just, that, namely, with which we being endowed by Him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and not only are we reputed but we are truly called and are just, receiving justice [or righteousness] within us, each one according to his own measure, which the Holy Ghost distributes to everyone as He wills, and according to each one’s disposition and cooperation.

So the righteousness of God is actually imparted to the believer. It is this renewal and making of righteousness within the believer.

Finally, in chapter 10, it speaks of the increase of this justification which we’ve received.

The Council says,

Having, therefore, been thus justified and made the friends and domestics of God, advancing from virtue to virtue, they are renewed, as the Apostle says, day by day, that is, mortifying the members of their flesh, and presenting them as instruments of justice [or righteousness] unto sanctification, they, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, faith cooperating with good works, increase in that justice received through the grace of Christ and are further justified . . .

So you actually get more justification as time goes on and as you grow in the grace of God.⁷¹ Your justification increases. In canon 24, the Council says,

If anyone says that the justice [or righteousness] received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.

So the Council here condemns those, like the Protestant Reformers, who say that one's justification before God is not increased by the good works that you do, that these good works are the fruit or the signs of justification. But the Catholic view is, no, these good works that you do as a Christian are the cause of the increase of your justification.

I think you can see that justification in the Roman Catholic view is very different than the Reformers' view. It is not a judicial or forensic act or declaration on God's part; it is a kind of moral transformation that begins in the believer when he places his faith in Christ and which is then increased and augmented as that believer participates in the sacraments of the church and leads an obedient life to Christ.

Judicial Declaration

By contrast, I think that the Reformers understood that in Romans, for example, Paul is talking about a judicial act where we are reckoned to be righteous. Not somehow made to be morally transformed righteous people, but rather God declares us to be righteous. We are reckoned as righteous because we have placed our faith in Christ.

One way to think about this is to realize that the opposite of justification is condemnation. The opposite of justification is not moral turpitude. The opposite of justification is condemnation. When a criminal is condemned by the court, he experiences the opposite of acquittal or pardon by the court. The language of the New Testament reflects this opposition between justification and condemnation. For example, Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." In Romans 8:33-34, Paul says, "It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?" Do you see the polar opposites there? God is the one who justifies. Who is it that condemns? Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The peace with God doesn't mean a kind of inner feeling of tranquility or serenity. Rather, it means that the enmity with God has been removed. We have been reconciled to God. Our sins are no longer counted against us. God's wrath and justice have been propitiated. God is no longer the one who condemns us, but now he is the one

⁷¹ 15:23

who justifies us.

So if you think of justification as the opposite of condemnation, I think you'll have a pretty firm handle on the Reformers' idea of justification as a judicial act of God whereby you are acquitted, pardoned, and declared to be righteous through Christ's righteousness.

It might be thought that this judicial view of justification amounts to little more than a legal fiction – that you are not really righteous; this is just a kind of legal fiction. I think a nice illustration of this would be the practice of some companies who have a policy that says that if a package is not returned within, say, three days then it is regarded as having been delivered.⁷² Even if it never shows up at your door step and you never get it, nevertheless if it's not returned in three days then the company considers it delivered. That would be an example of a legal fiction where they are just saying that it's delivered even though it never really is. Justification is not a legal fiction like that. Rather, we really are acquitted by God; we really are pardoned. The proper analogy for this kind of declaration would be marriage. When a man and a woman are pronounced man and wife, there is an actual change of status that takes place. They are no longer single now; they are in this new state of marriage. That is not a legal fiction. There is no sort of pretense that is going on here. They really are now married. It is official before the law. The couple may feel exactly the same as they did before they got married but their status has changed now in view of this declaration. Similarly, when we are justified by God, it is not as though God pretends that we are righteous or he pretends that we are acquitted. Rather, he really does forgive us and pardon us and declare us to be righteous on the basis of Christ's righteousness. So the notion is that we move from a state of condemnation before God to a state of proper relationship and justification before him in which we are now no longer guilty but are pardoned of his sin and justified before him and have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us.

DISCUSSION

Question: I was wondering if James has univocal use of the word justification that Paul does.

Answer: Yeah, you are thinking of the passage where James talks about faith and works?

Followup: That “we are not justified by faith alone.” I think he says that pretty explicitly.

Answer: Right. OK, James 2:18 and following:

But some one will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”; and he was called the friend of

⁷² 20:12

God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Now, on a *prima facie* level – at face value – this looks to be in contradiction to what Paul teaches in Romans where he says that Abraham was not justified by works, but he was justified by faith alone. Indeed, Luther felt very uncomfortable with the book of James. He called it “a right strawy epistle” and even thought maybe it shouldn’t be in the canon. But I think when you read James closely that it is evident that what he’s talking about is that a faith which is apart from works (in verse 20) is a barren faith. It is not a genuine faith. A faith apart from works is barren. And Paul certainly would have agreed with that. We will see that even more clearly when we talk about the New Perspective on Paul which emphasizes the role of works in Paul’s doctrine of justification. Then, notice what James says about the relation between faith and works in verse 22. “You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works.” The works are the completion of the saving faith.⁷³ Notice that the example he uses is not Abraham’s believing the promise – that is the one that Paul uses where Abraham believed God’s promise. He’s using here Abraham’s offering of Isaac upon the altar – a later event. So he sees Abraham’s willingness to offer the son of the promise, Isaac, on the altar as completing that faith that Abraham had that Paul was talking about when God says “and you shall all the nations in the world be blessed, and Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Here James sees that Scripture being fulfilled because that faith issued forth in works that showed it was real. He was willing to give up his son Isaac. So while, agreed, there is a sort of superficial, I think, conflict here, I feel confident that if Paul and James were to sit down together that Paul would be quite in agreement with James that genuine saving faith cannot be devoid of works but does issue in the fruit of good works which is the completion of that faith. And James would not think that the works that Abraham did were in some way meritorious and earned his salvation. So I think that while there is maybe superficial conflict here, really I don’t think that the conflict is deep.

Question: I obviously don’t understand the Catholic position. The idea that you are perfect after you are saved is false on its face with regard to personal experience and the experience of your relatives. Second, why would you have a confessional? Bless me Father for I have sinned. Well, what are you doing sinning? You have received actual righteousness from God.

Answer: Given that Trent says we can increase in righteousness or in justification, they must not think that you become morally perfect when you are imparted justification. This must be a sort of initial impartation of righteousness to you which you then grow in and increase in throughout your life. But I agree with you, it is hard to see how one could think that this was perfect or complete since it is something that you grow in.

Followup: Again, I think it is James 2:10 that says if you are guilty of one part, you are guilty of all. So in God’s view, if you are not absolutely, 100% perfect with his righteous, he can’t have a relationship with you.

Answer: I think that is the strength of the Reformers’ view – you are declared righteous and acquitted of all your sin. It is not as though you have some germ of righteousness

⁷³ 25:04

now within you which is going to grow and increase. You are right. That would not suffice for complete acquittal and pardon and so forth. What the Protestant does will be to supplement justification with a doctrine of sanctification – that through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, we do gradually come to be conformed to the image of Christ and experience a moral transformation over time. But the Catholic view seems to collapse that back into the doctrine of justification and says that we actually increase in our justification before God through our good works.

Question: It seems to me that the Catholic view puts the burden, or the responsibility, on the individual. If they are justified they will then increase in their moral . . . and through the sacraments to become a better, more moral person, which I would think lead to guilt because if they feel that they cannot or have not grown in that regard then they must go to confession, they must pay penance, they must do more to earn that. On the Protestant view, it seems that good works are a response to the sanctification. So you are doing it out of gratitude, which is very liberating. It is a very different inner response to that process – guilt versus joy. If I understand what you are saying.

Answer: I think that that observation is fair.⁷⁴ Now, if I were to speak on behalf of the Catholic Christian, Trent emphasizes that these good works that you do that merit eternal life are only done through the grace of God. So they would say it is God’s grace working itself out through you that enables you to do these meritorious good works.

Followup: But it is still enabling you. You are still doing it.

Answer: That’s right. And they are still meritorious. These are definitely works which increase your righteousness and thereby merit – that is the language that is used – merit eternal life even if those good works are wrought in you through the grace of God. I think you are right in saying that the Protestant view is very different and I think more biblical that these good works are the fruit of God’s work in your life. They are not meritorious.

Followup: It think, too, with the Protestant view, when you do them out of gratitude, it is not as though you are earning points or doing things whereas the other view, it seems to me, there is more of a self-centered approach in that – it is very slight, but – meriting brings in the self.

Answer: I hate to make judgments upon people’s motivations. I could imagine some Catholic Christian whose life has been radically transformed by God and who, out of deep gratitude, then wants to spend his life in service to Christ and living for him. So the motivation would be right. But nevertheless the theology is that the things that he is doing are meritorious, increases justification, and merit eternal life. There it seems to me the Protestant is quite right in drawing a line in saying that is erroneous.

Question: You use the terms “acquitted” and “pardoned” sort of in the same breath as if they are equal. I don’t tend to think of acquitted and pardoned as being exactly the same. While I was sitting here I looked them up in my dictionary and some of the definitions seemed to be very, very similar but could you tease out any difference there might be between acquitted and pardoned.

Answer: I wasn’t meaning to give any subtle difference between the two. I was meaning

⁷⁴ 30:04

them as synonymous. You are declared not guilty by God.

Followup: I guess I would see acquitted as declared not guilty – maybe you did something. Well, gosh, I guess maybe they are the same! Pardon is like, you did it but I'm pardoning you.

Answer: OK, OK. If that is what you mean, then I would be talking about pardon and not acquittal. Because we are guilty and so need God's pardon, not his recognition that "oh, well, you are not really guilty after all." Good point. What I meant was pardon in that sense.

OK, well, we are out of time. What we will do next time is look at the New Perspective on Paul which claims that the Protestant church has been misled by the Reformers and have drastically misunderstood Paul's doctrine of justification. So that will be next time.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Total Running Time: 33:53 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 10

Justification (The New Perspective View)

We've been talking about the doctrine of justification, and I argued last time that the Protestant Reformers were correct in understanding Romans 4 and other passages dealing with justification as being essentially forensic in nature. That is to say, God declares us just on the basis of Christ's work and our faith in him. The opposite of justification is condemnation and through our faith in Christ we have escaped a state of condemnation and are now declared to be justified before God.

We contrasted that with the Catholic view of justification which sees justification as a righteousness that is imparted by God to me whereby I become actually just. My character is transformed. This justification is something I grow in and increase in as life goes on and as I do meritorious works. We saw that the Catholic view is quite different from the Reformers' view which sees justification as a judicial act of God rather than some sort of a moral transformation that God works in your life.

Today we want to consider another alternative to the traditional Reformation view of justification, and this is a contemporary alternative – very new in fact – that is known as the New Perspective on Paul. The claim of the adherents of the New Perspective is that the traditional Reformers have seriously misunderstood Paul and that when we correctly interpret Paul we see that in fact he's not really all that different from what the Judaism of his day was saying.

One of the key figures in this so-called New Perspective on Paul is the biblical scholar E. P. Sanders. One of Sanders' pivotal works is called *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, published in 1977. Now, you may ask, "What is the force of that word 'Palestinian?'" Well, Palestine was the name of the Roman province that is occupied by Israel. So Palestinian Judaism was the Judaism of the people who lived in that region that we today call Israel. This is in contrast to Jews that were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. There were Jews living in Egypt. There were Jews in Rome, Jews in Greece, in Syria. These Jews were part of the Diaspora, or the Dispersion, as it's called. And what Sanders is writing about is Judaism as it existed in the Jewish homeland, not in the Dispersion or the Diaspora. Often, that Judaism is called Hellenistic Judaism because it was in Greek speaking culture and environment and absorbed some of the Greek culture. But what Sanders is talking about is Judaism in Palestine – the Judaism out of which the early church was birthed.

Sanders writes this with regard to Paul; he says,

On the point at which many have found the decisive contrast between Paul and Judaism – grace and works – Paul is in agreement with Palestinian Judaism. . . . Salvation is by grace but judgment is according to works; works are the condition of remaining 'in,' but they do not earn, salvation.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*

So the view here is very subtle.⁷⁷ The idea is that one gets into the covenant with God by God's freely bestowed grace. You are not a member of the covenant – the saving covenant of God – in virtue of your works. It is by God's grace. But one *remains in* the covenant by doing the required works. Now these good works don't earn salvation but they are the instrumental means by which one stays in the covenant. So this is a very subtle view. The claim is that these good works, while not earning salvation, are nevertheless necessary as the instrumental means by which a person remains in the covenant to which God has invited him by means of his grace.

So Sanders distinguishes between *getting in* and *staying in*. You get into the covenant by God's grace. That is how you get into the saving covenant with God – you get in by God's grace. But the way you stay in is by doing the good works that are required to stay in that covenant. Those works don't earn your salvation but nevertheless they are the means by which you stay in this saving relationship with God.

Many have been persuaded that Paul's view is really no different than that of Palestinian Judaism. You are saved by grace but then you stay in by means of doing these good works.

But a very penetrating critique of Sanders' view has been written by the New Testament scholar Robert Gundry. He writes an essay called "The Inferiority of the New Perspective on Paul." He doesn't mince words – "The *Inferiority* of the New Perspective on Paul" in his book *The Old Is Better*, published in 2005. Gundry agrees with Sanders that the evidence of Palestinian Judaism shows that Jews had a strong emphasis on obedience to the law as the way of staying in the covenant. So Palestinian Judaism was preoccupied with legal matters – how you apply the law to various situations, what does the law really require of you; extensive wrangling over the requirements of the law because this is the means by which one stays in the covenant with God. But Gundry denies that Paul has a similar emphasis. He writes,

Though obedience is integral and important to Paul's theology, alongside Palestinian Jewish absorption in legal questions his comments on obedience look proportionately slight. Furthermore, they usually take the form of exhortations, not of legal interpretation, extension, and application.⁷⁸

So what Gundry is saying here is that obedience is important to Paul. This is an integral part of Paul's theology – that having come to faith in Christ you now live a life of good works worthy of Christ. But he says it is very different from Palestinian Judaism. Paul isn't concerned with legal interpretations of the Jewish law, about how to extend the Jewish law to situations that are not obviously covered by the law, wrangling over how the law is to be applied in this or that circumstance. Think of Paul's letters. You don't find anything like that in the New Testament epistles. Indeed, as Gundry says, Paul's comments on obedience usually just take the form of exhortations like "Put away all wrath, malice, slander, envy, and foul talk from your mouths,"⁷⁹ "Have this mind among

(Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 543.

⁷⁷ 5:07

⁷⁸ Robert H. Gundry, *The Old Is Better: New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), p. 200.

⁷⁹ cf. Colossians 3:8

yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,”⁸⁰ “put to death the works of the flesh but walk in the Spirit.”⁸¹ It is these exhortations to holy living that Paul gives – very different from the sort of legal debates that characterized Palestinian Judaism.⁸² Think of the book of Galatians, for example. In Galatians Paul does not think of legal works as the means of staying in the covenant. The whole emphasis throughout Galatians is that both getting in and staying in is a matter of faith in Christ. It is faith from beginning to end. Faith in Christ is the means by which we get into relationship with God, and it is faith in Christ that is the means of staying in relationship with Christ, not works of the law.

Gundry recognizes that Paul does require, of course, that faith be attended by good works. If you have genuine saving faith then you will do good works. But he distinguishes Paul’s view from Judaism’s view in that these good works are not the means of staying in but rather they are evidence of genuine faith. That’s the difference. Paul also emphasizes the importance of good works but not as *the means of staying in* the covenant. Rather, they are *evidence* that your faith is truly genuine. This is what Gundry writes,

At the same time Paul demands good works, and Sanders appeals to this demand [in order to justify his interpretation]. But Paul’s un-Jewish extension of faith and grace to staying in makes good works evidential of having received grace through faith, not instrumental in keeping grace through works. . . . For him, then, getting in and staying in are covered by the seamless robe of faith as opposed to works with the result that works come in as evidential rather than instrumental.⁸³

Do you get what Gundry is saying? He’s saying that for Paul good works are necessary but they are necessary as evidence of the genuineness of your faith. They are not necessary as the instruments by which you stay in the covenant. They are not the instrumental means by which you stay in the covenant; rather, they are evidential in showing that you really are in a saving relationship with God through faith. So Paul’s emphasis is very different from the Judaism of his day. For Paul, it is faith from beginning to end that enables you both to get into the covenant and to stay in the covenant, and good works serve an evidential purpose.

Gundry recognizes that Paul does say that in the end people will be judged according to their works. Sanders uses these sorts of statements to argue that on the question of staying in the covenant, Paul holds fast to the Jewish mode of thinking according to which avoiding evil works and doing good works are the condition of staying in even though they don’t earn salvation. So Sanders says these works don’t merit salvation. That is not their purpose. But nevertheless they are the means of staying in the covenant, and Sanders says Paul believes in that since Paul says people will be judged according to their works. But as Gundry points out, “The evidence Sanders cites from Palestinian Jewish literature shows overwhelmingly that good works are a *condition* as well as a sign of staying in.”⁸⁴ That is to say, for Jews – for the Judaism of Paul’s day – the evidence shows overwhelmingly, Gundry says, that good works are not merely the sign that one is

⁸⁰ cf. Philippians 2:5

⁸¹ cf. Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:16-18

⁸² 10:13

⁸³ Gundry, *The Old is Better*, p. 203.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

in the covenant; they are the condition, they are how you stay in the covenant. So he says Sanders has correctly interpreted Palestinian Jewish literature in that respect.⁸⁵

Gundry goes on to say, “It appears, however, that for Paul good works are only (but not unimportantly!) a *sign* of staying in as well as of getting in.”⁸⁶ So for Paul the good works are not the condition of salvation, Gundry would say, rather they are the sign that one is a *bona fide* member of the covenant. He interprets 2 Corinthians 13:5 in this light.⁸⁷ 2 Corinthians 13:5 is Paul’s command to the church to test yourselves to see whether you are holding to your faith. Examine yourselves. Gundry says this points to the evidential role of good works. You examine yourself to see if your life befits a relationship with Christ. Test yourself to see if your faith is genuine. This is pointing to your evidence of your good works, not as the means or condition of salvation.

So, it seems to me that the key difference between Sanders and Gundry is that Sanders interprets these good works for Paul as being a condition of salvation whereas Gundry sees them as evidence of salvation. For Sanders, good works (according to Paul) are a condition of salvation, but on Gundry’s interpretation of Paul good works are merely evidence of salvation.

How shall we understand this distinction between “condition” and “evidence” that is drawn here? It occurs to me that here a bit of logic can actually be helpful, I think, in making sense of both Sanders’ view and Gundry’s insight. In logic, if you have an if-then statement like “P implies Q” then P is a sufficient condition of Q. That is to say, the truth of P is a sufficient condition for the truth of Q. If P implies Q then if P is true, Q is also true. That is what it means to say P implies Q. The truth of P is a sufficient condition for the truth of Q. The truth of Q is a necessary condition of the truth of P. In order for P to be true, Q must be true. Why is that? Because P implies Q. P is never true without Q’s also being true, because P implies Q. So, in order for P to be true, Q has to also be true. Otherwise, you could have P be true on its own and Q not be true. So in order for P to be true, Q must be true, which means that Q is a necessary condition of P. Or the truth of Q is a necessary condition of the truth of P. So in an if-then statement, P implies Q, P is a sufficient condition for the truth of Q, the truth of Q is a necessary condition for the truth of P.

Perhaps you can already see where I am going with this. Consider the statement:

If one has genuine saving faith, one will do good works.

This has the logical form of P implies Q. It is a conditional statement. If one has genuine saving faith, one will do good works.

Now, what that means is that genuine saving faith is a sufficient condition for doing good works. If you have genuine saving faith then you’ll perform the good works. So a sufficient condition of doing good works is having genuine saving faith.⁸⁸ But notice then

⁸⁵ 14:59

⁸⁶ Gundry, *The Old is Better*, p. 221.

⁸⁷ Dr. Craig misstates the book – the correct reference is 2 Corinthians. Gundry states, “Paul expresses his thought unambiguously in 2 Cor 13:5: ‘Test yourselves whether you are in the faith. . . .’” (Ibid., p. 221.)

⁸⁸ 20:04

that in a logical sense, doing good works is a necessary condition of genuine saving faith. You don't have genuine saving faith without doing good works. So in a logical sense good works are a necessary condition of salvation, not because they contribute to salvation or because they are the means by which one stays in the covenant; rather, they are a necessary condition simply in the purely logical sense that genuine saving faith doesn't exist without these good works.

I think this can help us to put together Sanders' and Gundry's view. If this is correct – and I think this statement is true, Paul would agree with this statement – then in a logical sense Sanders is right that good works are a necessary condition of salvation. Good works in a *logical sense* are a necessary condition of salvation. Nevertheless, Gundry is also correct in saying that although good works are a necessary condition of salvation they are not instrumental in bringing about salvation. They are not the *means* by which salvation is achieved. Rather, good works are the necessary *byproduct* or concomitant of saving faith. So even though they are a necessary condition of saving faith in a logical sense, nevertheless Gundry is right in saying they are not the instrumental cause of salvation.

Gundry says, and I'll conclude with this quotation from his essay, "The question is not whether Paul taught the necessity of good works but whether such necessary works are evidential of salvation or contributory to salvation." Do you hear the distinction there? The question is not whether Paul taught the necessity of good works. They *are* a necessary condition of salvation! That's not the issue. Rather, he says, the question is "whether such necessary works are evidential of salvation or contributory to salvation." Are they merely the sign of genuine saving faith or are they the means by which one stays in the covenant or finds salvation? Gundry goes on to say,

If Paul taught them as necessary evidence of salvation but not as a necessary contribution to it, then his teaching on works does not create an inconsistency with his teaching on justification by faith apart from meritorious works.⁸⁹

So it seems to me that once we make the fine distinctions that we can logically, I think we can embrace the insight of Sanders that for Paul logically good works are a necessary condition of salvation, but then we see with Gundry Paul's consistent doctrine of justification by faith apart from works in the sense that the good works are neither meritorious nor are they the instrumental means which contribute to salvation. Rather, they serve as necessary evidence of the genuine saving faith of the regenerate believer.

DISCUSSION

Question: Given this position, what does it say about rewards in heaven for those that have done meritorious works?

Answer: Gundry doesn't address that question but obviously the Scripture does teach that there will be rewards in heaven to Christians.⁹⁰ I would see these not as meritorious of salvation or contributing to salvation; that is simply through faith. But it would be an

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 224.

⁹⁰ 25:02

expression of God's generosity to those who have served him well. It is his saying "well done good and faithful servant." The Scripture does say that there will be rewards in heaven given for that kind of service. It is an expression of God's generosity and kindness to us.

Followup: One other thought – it doesn't go the other way where you can have Q and not have P. For example, you can do good works and not be saved.

Answer: Right.

Followup: But it is a condition of salvation.

Answer: Right, that is a good point. Notice that it would be logically fallacious to say that "if P then Q, therefore if Q then P." That is a logical fallacy. You can't say that because P implies Q that Q implies P. So what you rightly point out is you can do good works but that doesn't mean you have salvation. Those are a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition of salvation. Good point.

Question: That sort of rolls right into my question: what is the definition of good works? Is good works just doing good things and not doing bad things morally? Or does it have to do with actions that sort of point people to Christ in some way? Are works neutral? Can works be neutral?

Answer: Think of what Paul talks about in his letters in terms of his exhortations to holy and righteous living that reflects what it is like to be a Christian – the fruit of the Spirit versus the works of the flesh. Think of the latter chapters of Ephesians and Colossians where he talks about what to put away and what to put on. There are all sorts of virtues that one is to clothe oneself with like patience, brotherly love, kindness, being forbearing with others, and so forth. And put off things like anger, rancor, divisiveness, lust, and avarice. Those are the negative works. And the good works tend to primarily be these virtuous qualities that would be evidence in service. They don't exist in abstraction, they work themselves out, I think. But it is not just doing evangelism, or doing things directly for Christ. I think it is showing the kind of character that someone will have who walks in the fullness of the Holy Spirit on a day-by-day basis.

Question: I had a comment first. You were mentioning in passing that Galatians really primarily talks and debates this idea that salvation is continued by works and a particular verse that sticks out in that is Galatians 3:3 when Paul says, "You foolish Galatians. Did you who began in the Spirit, are you perfected in the flesh?" So Paul seems to be making a pretty clear distinctive that these people who are already saved but now are starting to incorporate works into the essential of keeping the faith. He is kind of clearly debating that. I have a question that is kind of paired with this though because Paul seems to make several statements. I was trying to find them, I couldn't find them in time; maybe you will know where they are. But it seems that he says a few things that cause people to kind of get a little confused at times about himself not being one hundred percent sure that he has attained salvation. He kind of checks himself. I think there is some in 1 Corinthians and in Romans. I am not sure. You might have an idea of what verse I'm talking about.

Answer: I know the passages you mean where he says things like this: "Brethren, I do not consider that I myself have attained this, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and pressing forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the mark of the upward call in

God and Christ Jesus.”⁹¹ So he does have a tentativeness that I find very prudent. I think that one should not be presumptuous and say, “I’m gonna make it to the end. I am going to be faithful.” That was Peter’s mistake when he said, “Lord, I will never deny you. Though they all fall away, I’ll never fall away.” And Jesus said, “Before the night is out, Peter, you will deny me three times.”⁹² So Paul, I think you are quite right in saying, says “that though I have assurance of my salvation, I don’t rest on my laurels. I don’t assume that I already made it. I keep pressing on toward that call.” I think the importance of finishing well is something that as we grow older impresses itself upon us all the more – not to fall near the finish line the way, say, Solomon did who began so well but then didn’t finish well. The importance of finishing well, I think, is what you are underlining for us. Now, insofar as perhaps the question beneath the surface that you are asking might be, “Well, can we lose our salvation?” We will take that up in a subsequent lesson. We will get to that question.

Question: Could you comment on (in connection with your discussion) Philippians 3:15? In fact, it is just before that in verse 13 where Paul says, “I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet.”

Answer: Yes, this is the passage I was thinking of.

Followup: In verse 15 he says, “Let us therefore as many as are perfect have this attitude.” Let me add to that, Paul says in Romans 7 that he struggles, he can’t do the things he wants to do. Right? And then in 2 Corinthians 12 he says he struggles with pride, and he’s been given a thorn in the flesh to control his pride. Maybe you can discuss those points and fit those in?

Answer: When he talks about, in verse 15 of Philippians 3, “Let those of us who are” – and you translated it “perfect” – my translation says, “Let those of us who are mature be thus minded.” I think that that is the sense here. Not moral perfection which only Christ has. He doesn’t think that any of the Philippians are perfect. But those who are mature believers in Christ, they are like the fruit that is now ripened and is delicious. Those who are mature believers should be minded in the way Paul describes, not that we have to be perfect.

The other passages you cited – I think Romans 7 – I think it is a mistake to interpret that in some sort of autobiographical way about Paul. I think what he is expressing there is the state of the natural man who is struggling with the desires of the flesh and are at war with the spirit. And he sees this finally being relieved in Christ in Romans 8:1 – “thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord.” He’s delivered us and there is no condemnation now to those in Christ Jesus.

The thorn in the flesh, I take it, was a physical malady that Paul possessed. He asked God to take it from him three times and the Lord said, “No, my grace is sufficient for you.” And Paul then boasts, he said I would prefer to boast in my weakness because then the power of Christ will be all the more evident in me. I don’t think this is indicative that the apostle Paul had a particular problem with pride. On the contrary, he says this is given me to prevent me from being too elated with all the revelations and things God has given me.

⁹¹ cf. Philippians 3:13-14

⁹² 30:04

So I would not interpret that as that Paul was a prideful person, but that he humbly accepts that God's strength and grace would be more manifest in his body by not healing him from this physical malady that was a burden to Paul and apparently a burden to those who he was with. So he boasts in his weakness. So I see that this is really something that is quite a credit to Paul's character that he would have this kind of attitude toward physical disability. And that can be a real encouragement to folks who are struggling with physical disability today.

Question: I tend to find a comfort in Philippians 2:12-13 where he says, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Well, that is pretty scary there. But then he backs it up by saying, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." So it is the Holy Spirit working in us to get us to do these works.⁹³ So it is him doing everything anyway.

Answer: Yes. And in the same connection, Ephesians 2:8-10 where he talks about "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." So as you work out your own salvation, God is at work in you to reform your character, to perfect you, bring you to maturity, and do these good works that are the necessary concomitants of genuine saving faith.

Well, I think then you can see that the Reformers' view (which I take to be the correct interpretation of Paul's teaching) is quite in contrast both to the Catholic view as well as to the New Perspective on Paul. For Paul, I think, justification is a judicial act whereby God declares us righteous, pardons us of sin, puts us into a right relationship with him, on the basis of Christ's atoning work.

Next time we will continue to explore more deeply the doctrine of justification.⁹⁴

⁹³ 35:07

⁹⁴ Total Running Time: 36:42 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 11

Imputed Righteousness

Last time we looked at two alternatives to the Reformation view of justification. We talked about the Catholic view of justification, and then we looked at the New Perspective on Paul. I offered criticisms of both of those views.

There is one further aspect, however, of the New Perspective that I want to say a few words about because I think this is quite important, and it represents a significant challenge to the Reformers' view of justification which a number of evangelicals find persuasive. That is the question of *imputation*.

On the traditional Reformation view, there is a kind of dual imputation involved in justification. My sin and guilt is imputed to Christ who bears that sin and guilt and pays the penalty. In turn Christ's righteousness is imputed to me. So in Christ I am righteous; I am declared by God to be righteous on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Part of the New Perspective which some evangelicals find persuasive is that although there is an imputation of our sin and guilt to Christ, they would deny that there is any imputation of Christ's righteousness to me. Rather, justification simply involves the declaration of pardon on God's part. On the basis of Christ's atoning death Christ has taken our sin and guilt from us and now we are declared to be forgiven and we are redeemed by Christ. But they would deny that there is any imputation of Christ's righteousness to me. What they will point out is that the biblical basis for the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness is very thin. They claim that it is very difficult to find in the New Testament any sort of biblical basis for the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. This is a theological construct of the Reformers that some would say finds little or no support in Scripture.

For example, Robert Gundry, the same scholar who argued for the inferiority of the New Perspective on Paul, agrees that the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer is not a biblical doctrine, that this is not taught in the New Testament, and therefore he argues against this. Gundry looks at passages like Romans 4:2-5 and argues that these passages do not teach the imputation of Christ's righteousness. In Romans 4:2-5 Paul says,

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.

So Gundry claims that the doctrine of justification by faith does not teach the imputation of Christ's righteousness to Abraham or to the believer. Rather, what it teaches is that God counts, or reckons, one's *faith* as righteousness. Since Abraham had no works by which he might be justified before God, God counted his *faith* as righteousness. God chose to reckon his faith to be righteousness, and therefore Abraham was righteous before

God. So there isn't really any imputation in these verses.⁹⁵ There is no suggestion in these passages that God reckons or attributes or counts to Abraham Christ's righteousness. Rather what God does is, since the believer doesn't have any meritorious works, he reckons the believer's faith as righteousness and hence the believer is counted righteous in virtue of God's counting faith as righteousness. So it is your own faith (that is, the faith in Christ that you have) that God then reckons as righteousness, and there really isn't any imputation that is taught in these passages.

How might we respond to this critique of the traditional doctrine? Let me say that I haven't devoted significant study to this question which I think certainly merits further exploration. But I will share just a few reactions off the top of my head to this criticism of the traditional Reformation doctrine. It seems to me that the passages in which faith is reckoned as righteousness, such as Romans 4, are not the relevant passages that we ought to be looking to for a doctrine of imputation. Indeed, it would seem in these passages there isn't any imputation explicitly being taught. Rather, I think that it would be to other texts rather than these that one would turn for justification for a doctrine of imputation. I am thinking particularly of 2 Corinthians 5:21. Here Paul, speaking of Jesus Christ, says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Now there I think a dual imputation may well be in view. Christ, for our sake who knew no sin, the sinless Son of God, was made to be sin. That seems to be teaching the imputation of our sin and guilt to Christ. The sinless Son of God was made to be sin for our sake. Then the second clause seems to teach the reverse imputation, "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." That is to say, insofar as we are in Christ we have God's own righteousness. That would seem to be an imputed righteousness. It is not a righteousness that we have in and of ourselves. It is not our faith that is being reckoned as righteousness here, is it? Rather, insofar as we are in Christ we become God's righteousness just as Christ became sin for us. So I think that on a basis of a passage like 2 Corinthians 5:21, one might well say that we have here this notion of a dual imputation – the imputation of our sin to Christ and then of his righteousness to us.

Gundry does discuss this passage. He responds: notice it does not say that Christ's righteousness is ours. It says "in Christ we become the righteousness of *God*." So it isn't saying the righteousness of *Christ*. Paul could easily have said that. It says the righteousness of *God*. Therefore, this isn't contemplating an imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. Well, I guess I would say in response to that: since Christ is God, this seems to be quite a trivial difference to me. Insofar as we are in Christ, we have divine righteousness which is properly Christ's. Remember we talked about (in our discussion of the mystical union that we have with Christ) how in Christ we are blessed with all of these spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. The righteousness of God would be one of those things we would have insofar as we are in Christ – united and identified with him. So I think it would not be at all inappropriate for Paul to say that in Christ we have the righteousness of God.

I noted that elsewhere in the New Testament sometimes Christ is spoken of as God.⁹⁶ For

⁹⁵ 4:57

⁹⁶ 10:00

example, Acts 20:28 is a very striking example of this. In Acts 20:28, (which is interestingly a Pauline speech – it is Paul’s final address to the Ephesian elders), Paul speaks of how God has rescued us “by his own blood.” That is a striking phrase. God the Father doesn’t have any blood, right? Because he doesn’t have a body. This is clearly Christ’s blood; it is the blood of the human nature of Christ. It is Jesus’ blood. Yet, Acts 20:28 speaks of God’s own blood, which is clearly Christ’s blood. So I think it is not at all inappropriate to talk about the righteousness of Christ as the righteousness of God anymore than to speak of the blood of Christ as the blood of God as Acts 20:28 does. So I think that that is a rather desperate response to this passage. It seems to me that it in no way undermines the notion that insofar as we are in Christ the righteousness of God, that righteousness which is properly Christ’s, is attributed to us.

Moreover, by way of criticism of the non-imputation view, on the view that there is no imputation of Christ’s righteousness it seems to make faith a meritorious work, doesn’t it? If we have no works to justify us before God and God looks at us and says, “OK, I am going to treat your faith as though it was righteousness. I am going to count your faith as righteousness,” then isn’t our faith somehow turned into a meritorious work that makes us justified before God? It is because I put my faith in him that now faith becomes the means of my justification. God counts my faith as righteousness. Now Gundry responds to that by saying “No, Paul always opposes faith to works.” Paul doesn’t think of faith as a meritorious work. Paul always contrasts faith and works. But surely that is exactly the point! The contrast between faith and works only makes sense, it seems to me, on an imputation sort of view. If you are arguing that there is no imputation then it does seem to turn faith into a meritorious work which is incompatible with Paul’s contrasting faith and works. For Paul, our faith is not any kind of a work that we perform that merits salvation. So the opposition between faith and works in Paul doesn’t do anything to ameliorate the problem here that on a non-imputation view it seems to turn faith into a meritorious work. The notion that faith is opposed to works only seems to make good sense if the righteousness which we have in Christ is extrinsic to us. It is not my faith which is counted as righteous in the sense that now I am righteous because of my faith. Rather, there is an extrinsic righteousness which, in virtue of my union with Christ, I now come to share.

Moreover (and this would be the second part of my criticism), suppose faith isn’t a meritorious work as Gundry acknowledges – faith doesn’t do anything to save you. Then it seems that the non-imputation view makes justification into a legal fiction. Remember we talked before about, on the Reformers’ view, God’s declaring us righteous or just in Christ is not a mere legal fiction; we actually are acquitted by God. We actually do become righteous in Christ. But if you say that there is no imputation of Christ’s righteousness, and if my faith doesn’t work righteousness in some way, then God’s regarding my faith as righteousness does seem to turn justification into a mere legal fiction. It is like the example I gave of the company who says that if you don’t return the package within three days then it is counted as delivered to your house. Whether it ever was delivered, it doesn’t matter. If you don’t return it within three days it counts as delivered.⁹⁷ That is a legal fiction. Surely our justification in Christ, as Gundry would acknowledge, is more than a legal fiction. Yet, the non-imputation view, I think, does

⁹⁷ 15:02

threaten to reduce justification to a mere legal fiction. If it is not, then I think it makes faith into a meritorious work that God counts as righteous.

So, although the biblical or exegetical justification for the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us I think needs further development (I would like to study it more myself), nevertheless on the basis of these considerations I am inclined to say that we ought to hold to it, and that it does make the best sense out of both forensic justification by God as well as passages like 2 Corinthians 5:21. I would say that even if the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us is a theological construct, that is perfectly fine. So is the Trinity. So is the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. But it would be a theological construct that makes good sense of the biblical data and of the doctrine of justification by faith through grace.

DISCUSSION

Question: How would Old Testament passages like Isaiah 61:10 – talking about being clothed in his righteousness – how would that enter into this discussion?

Answer: OK, let's have a look at that passage. Isaiah 61:10,

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Insofar as you think that that is talking about Christ or his redemptive work, I could see where you might use a passage like that to justify an imputation of righteousness. I suspect that these folks would say that these Old Testament passages are either not immediately applicable to Christ or that they are too obscure to be used. What we would need is some clear New Testament passages talking about the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

Question: I think it is quite clear that the New Testament does teach double imputation. Turn over one chapter, go to Romans 5 which is all about justification, and particularly look at verses 17 through 21. If you will give me a minute I'll read those:

For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ This version of the text is from the NASB (New American Standard Bible).

I believe it is quite clear there that Paul . . . see, Paul is talking about there was a two-fold aspect of what Christ did. There was active obedience and then there was passive obedience. What he did on the cross, although it was great, it was wonderful, and an incredible act of love, it was a passive act. Anybody could have died a martyr's death on the cross, but not anybody was worthy enough to do it. Only Jesus Christ was worthy enough to do it because he was righteous. And it says in the Scripture in Hebrews (I don't know the verse) that he learned obedience. So Jesus Christ was righteous and he does impute that to us.

Answer: And that is the typical Reformation doctrine – Christ, through his sinless life, had an active obedience to God whereby he lived a righteous life before him, in addition to his passive obedience of submitting to the death on the cross.⁹⁹ But I am embarrassed that I didn't think of these verses! Because you are right, the free gift of righteousness that he speaks of there – “those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness” – that could only refer to divine righteousness, not to some sort of righteousness that a person has himself. So, yes, I think that is very well taken. That is certainly a powerful passage for this.

Question: Continuing the piling on, I am very surprised at this argument. I have seen more than one commentary on the book of Romans where the theme was “A righteousness from God.” Also, if you look at Romans 1:17, it says, “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”¹⁰⁰ The fact that it uses the phrase “in the gospel” ties it to Christ because he is the heart of the Gospel. That would imply that the righteousness from God is associated with that.

Answer: Yeah, I think that there certainly those who deny the doctrine of imputation are aware of these passages and they, I take it, would interpret them more along Gundry's lines that it is teaching that your faith is reckoned as righteousness to you. But they would say without imputation. So I think we need more passages like the one previously mentioned. Although here even in yours it talks about the righteousness of God – right? – which is ours. My translation puts it a little different. It is even more in favor of imputation than yours. It says, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Not that the righteous shall live by faith, but he who through faith is righteous shall live. It is the righteousness of God that is revealed by faith, he says in Romans 1:17. So, yeah, pile on! You are welcome to because I am inclined to agree with this. But I have been surprised, frankly, in conversations with New Testament colleagues at the Evangelical Theological Society meetings at how quickly they are ready to give up imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. I am not ready to do that.

Question: I was wondering if you could comment on N. T. Wright's system. It appears to be imputation-less. If you read *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (it's enormous) but . . .

Answer: Yeah, I didn't mention N. T. Wright but you are quite correct to say that N. T. Wright is one of the champions on the New Perspective on Paul that we've been talking about. I chose E. P. Sanders as a representative of it; he is sort of the fountainhead. But among evangelicals, N. T. Wright would be one of the principal proponents of this view

⁹⁹ 20:13

¹⁰⁰ This version of the text is from the NIV (New International Version).

that I am criticizing.

Followup: I know with N. T. Wright in his speeches, he seems to indicate the question “How do I get to heaven?” is simply the wrong question regarding justification. It is not about going to heaven after you die. I think it is about some other, maybe more of a temporal or earthly justification. Do you have any comment on that?

Answer: I don’t. This New Perspective on Paul is very multifaceted and it is very difficult to understand. It is so ambiguous and so wooly in its different proponents that it is very hard to sort out. So what I’ve said here seemed to me to be the essential elements that would be important to deal with. Certainly with regard to justification, Paul very often connects forgiveness of sins with eternal life, which means going to heaven. It is being in Christ and therefore having eternal life and redemption. So I don’t see that as at all foreign to Paul’s concerns.

Followup: I sense a bit of postmodern hermeneutics in this method where you use a putative cultural context to sort of make the text putty in your hands. There is a little bit of that in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*.

Question: You’ve said a couple of times just in the last few moments about a New Perspective on Paul, which is something I’m not understanding.¹⁰¹ Perhaps you spoke about it in the past. As someone who believes Paul is phenomenally important, can you clarify that a little bit? Is this New Perspective a positive thing or a negative thing? Are they minimizing Paul or are they maximizing Paul?

Answer: I did talk about this during the last couple of weeks. So you might look at the podcasts if you are interested in following up on that. But the idea there was that people like E. P. Sanders claim that we have misunderstood Paul and that Paul actually was largely in agreement with the view of Palestinian Judaism; that it was through works that one stays in the covenant. You get in by grace but then you stay in by doing good works. I wanted to disagree with that point of view and say that this is not correct. For Paul, works are a necessary concomitant of faith because genuine faith necessarily issues in works but the works are not the instrumental means by which one stays in the covenant. They are evidence of the genuineness of one’s faith which is the basis of justification. But here we want to go then another step and say this faith is not some sort of meritorious work or a legal fiction when God reckons it as righteous. Rather, it is on the basis of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us that faith becomes the means of salvation. Faith is merely the conduit through which we access God’s righteousness and forgiveness. So, although this so-called New Perspective is making inroads among some evangelical scholars, I am skeptical of it, particularly these elements of it.

Question: I agree with you. I think if you have the imputation of our guilt and sin to Christ and accept his leadership as Lord and believe – you have to do all three – and believe he was raised again, then you automatically have of his Spirit and he is in you. Therefore, you have righteousness because he is righteous in you. So you automatically get it back if you do those three. You have to have the fact that you acquiesce to his Lordship, because that is not trusting without the Lordship. You are just believing like a demon. If you don’t believe he rose again, you will not place your hope in him.

¹⁰¹ 25:12

Answer: Alright, you are talking there of the conditions that need to be in place to access this salvation. But it is important to keep in mind here that justification on the Reformation view is a forensic act. It is not that we are filled with the righteous Holy Spirit within us and therefore we have righteousness in it. This is a forensic righteousness whereby we are declared righteous on the basis of Christ or God's righteousness being imputed to our account. It is as though you had a bank account in which all of your debts were placed in somebody else's account and all of his assets were placed in your account now. It is a kind of transaction that takes place.

Followup: I understand what you are saying but I don't believe God's righteousness is what is imputed to any of the old self remaining. So when you do an act of sin, that is not righteous. That will be burned up in the judgment when we are all tried by fire. Works don't keep you in salvation. It is acquiescing to his life. You are letting him be Lord. That is what Lordship is. You are hoping in him; you know he loves you just like you are. That's what righteous is from our side. From God's side, he always loves us unconditionally; he just wants us to accept his salvation.

Answer: Alright, what I hear you saying is the necessity of walking in Christ's will, walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, and so forth, for having salvation.

Followup: The only life in heaven is God's life and he is giving you the ability to live it again without condemnation.

Answer: We will talk some more about perseverance and sanctification later on.

It is very interesting, isn't it?¹⁰² We never think about these things sometimes until challenged. And then when we are challenged, it is good. It asks us, "Wait a minute. Why do I believe this? Should I believe this?" It is good to have these sorts of challenges occasionally.

Question: Hebrews 10:38-39 – I would like to hear what you think both sides would say about these two verses.

Answer: [starting to read from verse 37]:

"For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls.

It is not clear to me that that has direct relevance to the topic today, apart from just referring to Christian people as being God's righteous ones. We would all, I think, agree with that. Whether this is a righteousness that is imputed to us or someone like Gundry would say God counts our faith as righteous, we are his righteous ones. But what I think you are concerned about, I take it, is that if this person shrinks back it looks like God is going to destroy him. The author of the book of Hebrews says to his readers, "But we are not among those. We are not going to shrink back and be destroyed. We are going to persevere and keep our souls to the end." What that raises is the issue of the perseverance of the saints or what is sometimes called popularly "eternal security." That is to say, can someone who is a regenerate believer lose his salvation? We will take that issue up in the

¹⁰² 30:03

next couple of lectures or so.

Followup: Maybe I misunderstood. I thought part of this (I had written down) that salvation is by grace but one remains in the covenant by good works. Was that not part of their position?

Answer: Ah. Well, I think I see why you would say that is relevant because it says the righteous shall live by faith, so it is through faith that he perseveres, right? Not by works.

Followup: I was trying to figure out where they get their Scripture for believing . . . what would they base it on? This verse on those “who shrink back and fall away.” . . .

Answer: Ah. Right. In what sense do they shrink back? You could say (if you are on the New Perspective view) that this shows that works are necessary for staying in. You shrink back and don’t do the good works then you are going to fall out of the covenant. So this shows that it is through good works that one remains in the covenant.

Followup: So we would say they were not a believer if they fell away, right?

Answer: Some would say that. But it depends on your view. If you are Reformed, Presbyterian, or a Baptist, you would say that. But if you were a Methodist or a Catholic you wouldn’t say that. You would say that that person was in a state of grace but then fell out of it and lost salvation. But I think, if I understand you right, what you are raising is the question, “How do you stay in?” Is it through faith as the verse 38 seems to say (“My righteous one shall live by faith”) or is it through good works as the second half of the verse might suggest (“If you shrink back and begin to live unrighteously then God will have no pleasure in you.”) You can see how this verse might be cited as a proof text for either side, which is part of what makes it difficult to interpret things. We will talk more about perseverance later on.

In conclusion, from what we said today, I think that there is good biblical basis and it makes good theological sense to say that not only are our sins imputed to Christ and our sin and guilt borne by Christ, but as a reflex action insofar as we are in Christ and united with him his righteousness (God’s righteousness) is imputed to us and God declares us to be righteous in virtue of our union with Christ.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Total Running Time: 35:18 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 12

The Grounds, Means, and Results of Justification

We have been dealing with the doctrine of justification. We've spent the lion's share of our time talking about justification as a forensic act on God's part whereby he declares us righteous. Since this is the center of the debate over justification today, it is appropriate that we should have spent most of our time there. But now we want to wrap up this study by looking at the grounds of justification, the means of justification, and the results of justification.

So if you have your New Testament with you, I invite you to get it out because we will be looking up a number of passages together.

Grounds of Justification

First, in terms of the grounds of justification, *justification is grounded first and foremost in God's free will and mercy*. God was under no obligation to forgive or pardon anybody. The fact that he would pardon anyone is the result simply of his own freedom of choice and his mercy.

Look at what Paul says in Titus 3:5-7, a marvelous passage on justification. There Paul writes,

... he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

So the reason that justification is by grace rather than by merit of our own good works is precisely because it is rooted, as Paul says, "in God's own mercy." Given that all people were justly condemned before God, God was under no obligation to forgive anybody. The fact that he should choose to save even some is a demonstration of God's mercy toward us. I think that is the significance of Romans 9:16. There Paul says, "So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy." Whom God chooses to save is not determined by us; it is determined by God. It is God who has chosen by his own mercy to save whom he chooses to save. He has chosen to save, as we've said in the past, those who have faith in Christ Jesus. So fundamentally the justification that we experience is rooted in God's free will and mercy.

But this isn't to say that God simply blinks at sin, that he just cancels people's sin. Rather there is an atoning sacrifice for those sins that makes that extension of his mercy possible. So *secondly the grounds of justification are the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ*. Look at Romans 5:8-9:

But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Notice the phrase here “justified by his blood.” The word “blood” here is a metaphor for the death of Christ – that atoning sacrificial death. That is why he says in verse 8 that Christ died for us. The ground of our justification lies in that self-sacrificial atoning death of Jesus Christ on our behalf.¹⁰⁴

Look also at what Paul says in Galatians 3:11-14a. Paul says,

Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for [and then quoting here from the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk] “He who through faith is righteous shall live”; but the law does not rest on faith, for [now here quoting from Leviticus] “He who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, [quoting from Deuteronomy 21:23] “Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree” – that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles . . .

So here Paul says that while no one can be justified before God by the works of the law, nevertheless Christ has died for us – having become a curse for us. The curse of the law, the punishment of sin, that we rightly deserve was meted out upon Christ so that now God’s love and mercy is freed up to pardon and justify us.

So the grounds of justification are first in God’s free will and mercy and then secondly in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sin.

Means of Justification

That brings us then to the means of justification. As already indicated, the means by which we are justified is faith. Faith is the channel through which we appropriate God’s forgiveness and justification. Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul says, “For by grace . . .” There you see that undeserved mercy of God. “. . . you have been saved through faith . . .” Faith is the instrument, the channel, by which we receive the grace of God. Was this a human setup, this notion of salvation by grace through faith? No, for Paul goes on to say, “. . . this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast.” So it is through placing our faith in God or specifically in Christ that we appropriate the atoning death of Christ on our behalf and receive God’s grace.

Romans 3:21-26 expands on this. This, like the passage in Titus, I think is one of the premier passages in the New Testament speaking of justification. Paul says,

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

[So the righteousness of God is now manifested apart from the law. What righteousness is this? It is the righteousness through faith in Christ for everyone who believes.]

For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

[Everyone is justly condemned before God. There is no distinction.]

they are justified by his grace as a gift,

¹⁰⁴ 4:58

[There again you see that mercy of God that extends justification to us.]
through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,

[There is that atoning sacrificial death. It all comes together in this passage, doesn't it?]

whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood,

[That is to say his atoning death.]

to be received by faith.

[So faith, again, is the instrument or channel by which we appropriate this redemption.¹⁰⁵]

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous

[Or that he is just. There is a sort of pun here.]

and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.

That is the person who is justified by God: the one who has faith in Jesus. So faith is the channel by which we come to appropriate this justification.

Finally, Galatians 3:6-9, 24-26:

Thus [and now quoting from Genesis] Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." [quoting from Genesis 12.] So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

Then over in verse 24:

So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

So I think you can see in Paul's thinking how critical faith is as the means by which we appropriate the benefits of Christ's death and experience God's grace. God, in his sovereignty, has chosen to save and to justify those who have faith in Christ Jesus. So it is those who are people of faith that are the true sons of Abraham.

Results of Justification

Finally, what are some of the results of justification?

1. First and foremost, as we've seen, *there is full pardon*. Romans 5:18: "Then as one man's trespass [speaking here of Adam] led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." Then over in chapter 8 in

¹⁰⁵ 9:57

verse 1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” For those who are united with Christ by means of faith there is no condemnation. Rather there is full acquittal and pardon for our sins. We are justified, declared righteous, insofar as we are in Christ.

2. *We are adopted as God’s children.* Galatians 4:4-7, Paul says,

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

So insofar as we are in Christ we are adopted by God into his family as children of God and therefore heir to all of the promises that God gives to those who are his children.

3. *We have eternal life.* Romans 6:22-23:

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life.

[Notice there that the end of sanctification is eternal life.¹⁰⁶]

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So having been forgiven of all our sins, being declared righteous as God adopted us as children, we now are heirs to eternal life. We shall live with him forever. Death has been forever vanquished.

4. If this were not enough, *God gives us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.* Romans 8:9-10.

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness.

Notice what Paul says here. Those who belong to Christ are literally indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. So even though our bodies are mortal and will someday die, nevertheless we have within these mortal earthen vessels this eternal treasure of a transformed spirit or soul which will live forever because of the rebirth and regeneration that we’ve experienced by being united with Christ.

So not only do we have eternal life but until we reach the end of this life we are indwelt by the Spirit of God himself who will give us the power to live out this Christian life and will transform us increasingly into the character of Christ until we go to be with God in eternity at our death.

5. Finally, the fifth result of genuine justification is *good works*. Good works are the fruit of a regenerate Christian. Ephesians 2:10. Remember we read Ephesians 2:8-9 about how salvation is not due to works lest anyone brag about it. But then in verse 10, Paul goes on to say, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God

¹⁰⁶ 15:23

prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” I take it that what Paul is saying here is that God in his foreknowledge and sovereignty has got good works for you to do. Knowing that he would save you, that you would become a regenerate Christian indwelt by the Holy Spirit, God has foreordained that there are good works that he wants you to do. He wants you to walk in them. So for the remainder of our lives we have this commission to carry out. Faith is not some sort of inactive sterile doctrine. This is a living and active thing that will work itself out in the performance of these works that God has foreordained for us to accomplish.

This point is of course most strongly emphasized in the book of James. Look at the second chapter of the book of James, verses 14-24. What James has to say here puts him *prima facie*, or at face value, at odds with Paul about justification by faith apart from works. But I think a deeper reading of what James is saying here is that genuine faith is always attended by good works and that any “faith” that does not bare fruit in good works is not really genuine faith at all.¹⁰⁷ It is a pseudo-faith; an inauthentic faith. And with that Paul would certainly agree because Paul thinks that we’ve been created in Christ to carry out the good works that he has foreordained to us. So James says, beginning in verse 14:

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

But some one will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”; and he was called the friend of God.

Notice what James says there. It is not enough just to say you have faith. Anybody can say that. But a faith which doesn’t bear fruit in good works he says is a barren faith – a sterile faith. He says it’s a dead faith, not a living or active faith. An active faith he says was what Abraham had. For his faith was active in producing good works so that the faith was completed by those good works. The good works manifested the genuine, living, fruitful faith that Abraham had. So it was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. So he says, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” That is to say, not by that sterile, barren, dead faith that he is talking about. Then he gives the example of Rahab. So in verse 26 he says, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.”

So James’ emphasis is very strong that anybody who claims to have an authentic, living faith should have a faith that is active and fruitful in making a difference in that person’s

¹⁰⁷ 20:05

life.

That doesn't just mean that one will be preoccupied in doing things for God. It is very easy to get caught up in activities, constantly doing things for God. But on an even more fundamental level, these so-called good works are not just things that you do for God but rather these are character qualities that are the product of a transformed life. As the Spirit lives in us and conforms us to the image of Christ, as we are filled with the Holy Spirit and walk in the Spirit, God will produce in us the fruit of a transformed character. Look at Galatians 5:22-23. Paul says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law." So here Paul lists the virtues that are produced in a person's life – the character traits that are produced by the living, active Holy Spirit within that person. It will be more fundamentally what you *are* rather than just what you *do* that will be the manifestation of a genuine living faith that is in you.¹⁰⁸

So I think you can see that the doctrine of justification by faith is not just some academic, dry doctrine. Rather this is a doctrine that has tremendous implications. A full pardon and acquittal for sin, adoption into God's family as his children, the bestowal of eternal life, the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit within us, and finally the production of good works and a transformed character as the Holy Spirit and Christ's living within us works itself out in these good works. So this is a tremendously encouraging and practical doctrine, I think, that has great results in the Christian life.

That brings us to a close of our study of justification.

DISCUSSION

Question: I had a deep discussion about whether the Beatitudes are a condition for salvation. The Sermon on the Mount. It is what Jesus lays out – the blessedness of a character. And we are in deep discussion whether that is a condition of salvation.

Answer: Do you remember several lessons ago when we were talking about the New Perspective on Paul and the role that works plays in justification. We saw that people in the New Perspective thought that Paul agreed with Judaism of his time that although you get into the covenant by grace, the way you stay in it is by doing these good works. I argued against that by saying that these good works are the necessary byproducts of salvation – what we saw today about a living and active faith. So we can say that they are a condition of salvation in the logical sense, namely, if a person has genuine saving faith then he will have good works. In that purely logical sense they are a condition of salvation. But they are not a condition in the sense of a causal condition or the means by which one is saved. They are just a necessary implication of genuine saving faith and salvation. So the person who has genuine saving faith and who lives long enough should begin to manifest the sort of qualities that Jesus said would characterize people in the Kingdom in the Beatitudes. But those are not laying down preconditions for salvation. No.

Followup: Well, our salvation is . . . God has a big part to play in each salvation. He gives

¹⁰⁸ 25:12

us his Spirit so that we will have those attitudes (maybe infantile, but we will have those attitudes) because we have received the Spirit. But if God gives us that Holy Spirit and we reject him and continue to be prideful, those are not works. They are just attitudes. And those attitudes are what we decide to place our faith in believing in the blessedness of the Kingdom of God or the comfort and fill with righteousness with those attitudes. So I thought if we do not resist the Holy Spirit then we will automatically have those attitudes as we receive Christ by faith.

Answer: Well, let me say a couple of things if I understand you correctly. First, I don't think this is something that is just automatic. This is not passive. We shouldn't think, "If I just don't resist the Holy Spirit, he is going to transform my character." On the contrary, I think this does involve the idea of spiritual discipline. This involves effort. It is hard to get up in the morning and spend time in prayer, or to read your Bible and meditate. Sometimes you don't feel like witnessing to someone else. But you should. So this is not something that is passive.¹⁰⁹ I think this is something that is active and it does take effort in order to do this.

The other thing I would want to say is that to say that genuine faith issues in character transformation and good works is not to endorse some kind of Christian perfectionism. We will obviously still have defective characters that are fallen, we have feet of clay, our old sin nature doesn't just vanish, and so very often we will be very discouraged at how little progress we feel we've made. Certainly others can see those character defects in us more often than we see them in ourselves because so often we have blind spots. It will be your spouse that will see these character defects in you more clearly than you see them yourself, I think. So don't think that if a person fails to manifest the qualities of the Sermon on the Mount that that person isn't a genuinely regenerate Christian. That would be very judgmental. The fact is we are all going to fall short of these standards but there should be some fruits, some result, of being in Christ that will manifest itself in these good works or character qualities. But it won't lead you to a sort of Christian perfectionism.

Question: In your discussion of the moral argument, you are quick to point out that belief in God is not necessary for moral and ethical behavior, right? You say that even atheists who don't believe in God can be moral, ethical, and I presume people of good character. My question is: what is the difference between good works that are associated with faith (and I assume that means moral behavior, ethics, and good character) and just good old atheists who are good people?

Answer: Well, in terms of the moral quality of the good works, I don't see that there is any difference. I think that is one of the embarrassments often for us as Christians – the atheist or humanist might care more for the downtrodden and the oppressed and the afflicted than we do. That can be, I think, distressing. So I don't think we want in any way to depreciate the ethical quality of these works that non-believers will often be engaged in. I think we should say that these are wonderful and these are good things. But of course we know from what we've already said that no one is justified by works. You can do all of the greatest, most wonderful works in the world and they still wouldn't be enough to cancel your sin and to merit forgiveness and eternal life. So don't be afraid of

¹⁰⁹ 30:00

saying that these acts that unbelievers do are genuinely moral, good, commendable actions because you are afraid that you will be interpreted as saying they therefore merit eternal life. Not at all. The whole point is that no matter how good your works are, they never merit salvation and forgiveness of sin and going to heaven.

Followup: I guess I was sort of thinking about it from the other angle. What qualitatively is the difference between good works of a Christian and good works of a non-Christian? I guess neither one is meriting salvation, right?

Answer: I guess I don't see that there has to be a difference in the act itself. Maybe there will be a difference in the motivation for the act. Maybe in some cases people might volunteer, say, at the pregnancy center or to food distribution or something because really it makes them feel good. It makes them feel noble that they are doing these good works. That would be a less morally commendable motivation than someone who does it out of a genuine compassion and care for the people that he seeks to help. There could be differences in one's moral motivations that would be important, but the act itself – I don't see any reason to think that the moral quality of the act itself (of helping people like James talked about) is different for the Christian and non-Christian.¹¹⁰

Question: This James 2:24 has always bothered me a bit. James 2:24, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” It has always bothered me a bit. I like what you were saying earlier because it sounds like the difference between causation and correlation in terms that works are correlated to being justified not caused of being justified. Also I would just like to mention, I looked at our favorite commentary – *The Word Biblical Commentary* – and the way they translate it is, “You should be aware that a person is proved righteous by deeds, not but faith alone.” So there the word “justified” isn't obtaining justification but showing justification. I wonder what you thought of that?

Answer: That translation does make it sound more like evidence, doesn't it? I take it that, even if verse 24 taken in isolation presents a contradiction to Paul's doctrine, when you look at the context of the whole paragraph I think what James is saying is unobjectionable. He says faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works. Paul would agree with that. If that is what James means then Paul would say, “Yeah, that's right. I am not talking about a faith that is barren and dead,” which are the two adjectives that James used to describe this other kind of faith. So I think Paul would say, “I don't like the way you put it in verse 24 but I understand what you mean and I would agree with that. The faith I'm talking about is neither barren nor dead. It is living and it is fruitful, and I would agree with you that this kind of faith is active with works and is completed by works.” So I really do think when you look at the paragraph that what James means is something that Paul would not object to.

We are out of time. Next time we will turn to the next section on our outline which is the Doctrine of Perseverance – can a genuine, regenerate Christian lose his salvation and ultimately go to perdition?¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ 34:54

¹¹¹ Total Running Time: 37:34 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 13

Perseverance of the Saints (Calvinism)

Perseverance

We are going through a section of Christian doctrine on the Doctrine of Salvation. We've looked at such topics as God's election, regeneration, justification, and now we come to the subject of perseverance. This is often called in popular piety "eternal security." Maybe you've heard of it under that label rather than the perseverance of the saints.

The question here that we confront is whether or not a person who has been genuinely regenerated by the Holy Spirit, declared righteous by God, forgiven of sins, can lose his salvation and fall away and wind up, in fact, damned with his lot with the unbelievers and the non-elect? So the question is: if you become a Christian, will you inevitably persevere until your death and go to be with God so that you will be saved? Or is it possible for you, having once become a Christian, to fall away so that in fact you lose the salvation that you once had?

As with other issues that we've previously discussed under the Doctrine of Salvation, there are at least two broad perspectives on this question. One would be the perspective of Calvinism or Reformed theology, such as you would have, for example, in the Reformed churches – Presbyterian Church, Anglican Church, and so forth. The other perspective would be the Arminian perspective which would characterize groups like the Methodist denomination and, although Arminius was later, Lutheran theology and Catholic theology would also hold the perspective that a person can lose salvation. We will look broadly at Calvinism and Arminianism as our test cases of this doctrine.

Calvinism

The Elect Cannot Fall Away

With respect to Calvinist theology, the Calvinist theologian holds that the elect cannot fall away. This could be more clearly stated by saying, "Elect *individuals* cannot fall away." If you are an individual person who is elected and predestined by God, regenerated, declared righteous by him, it is impossible for you to fall away from the faith and to lose your salvation.

What are some of the passages to which the Calvinist could appeal to support such a view? Look at John 6:39-40. Here Jesus says,

... this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Here Jesus says that everyone that the Father has given to him will not be lost, but rather on the resurrection day Jesus will raise this person to eternal life. So if a person is

someone who is elect of God, it is not possible for you to lose your salvation and to perish. You will be raised to eternal life.

Turn over a couple of chapters to John 10:27-30. Here Jesus says,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Here Jesus says if you are truly a member of his fold then you will not be snatched away.¹¹² You will be given eternal life. You shall not perish. No one shall snatch you out of Christ or God the Father's hand. You are secure in him.

Look at John 17 for another reiteration of this truth. John 17:11. Jesus is praying for the church and he says,

And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Here Jesus himself prays for you. He prays for the church that they will be kept by the power of God. So we have the prayers of Jesus himself on behalf of the church that they will be preserved. Indeed, in one sense rather than talking about the perseverance of the saints, one might better talk about the preservation of the saints. God will preserve them; he will keep them until the final day.

Turn over to John's first epistle – 1 John 3:9. Here John says, "No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God." Then turn over to 1 John 5:18, "We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." Obviously, John didn't think that we live sinless lives as Christians. In fact in the first chapter of his epistle he says that if we confess our sins then he is faithful and just to forgive our sins. He knows that as Christians we will on occasion sin. But what he seems to be talking about here would be a lifestyle of sin that would be antithetical to being a Christian. What he says is that the one who is born of God is kept by God. He says he who is born of God keeps him and therefore the evil one does not touch him. Christ himself will keep you from this life of sin that would result in your perdition. So one is secure if you are living this righteous life for God that is consistent with being a Christian.

Finally, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians – Ephesians 1:13-14. Paul says,

In him [that is, in Christ] you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Here Paul says that for those who have believed in Christ, these persons are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Remember you are regenerated by and indwelt with the Holy Spirit as a Christian. This Holy Spirit, he says, seals you and is the guarantee of your inheritance

¹¹² 5:19

until you acquire possession of it. So it is this indwelling Holy Spirit who will preserve you and keep you in the faith until you go to be home with God in glory.

So on the basis of passages like these the Calvinist would say that “once saved, always saved” so to speak. You cannot lose your salvation.¹¹³ If you are genuinely regenerated as a Christian then you will persevere and God will keep you in the faith until the end. Therefore, one cannot fall away from faith or lose one’s salvation.

Apostasy

Those passages are pretty compelling, I think we would agree. But there is another set of passages in the New Testament which is a challenge to this view and is difficult for the Reformed theologian to deal with. I am thinking here of passages in which the Scripture warns of the danger of apostasy; that is to say, of falling away from faith. There are passages in the New Testament that seem to contemplate the possibility of apostasy; that is to say, turning your back on Christ, rejecting him out of your life, and in effect going back to a non-Christian state.

Look at the book of Hebrews, for example, for passages of this nature that are especially riveting and clear. Hebrews 6:1-8 concerns such warnings which are, I think, very sobering. The author says,

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.

Now that dramatic analogy between the fruitful crop bearing land and the worthless land that brings forth thorns and thistles rather than good fruit is a dramatic illustration between the believer and the apostate. He says the end of this wretched land is to be burned – you clear that land of its thorns and thistles by burning it. He says here that if these persons commit apostasy, it is impossible to restore them again to repentance. These people who have been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and the powers of the age to come, if they commit apostasy he says it is impossible for them to be restored again to repentance. Their end is to be burned. They seemed to have forfeited their salvation.

If that were not enough, turn over to Hebrews 10:26-31 where the author reiterates these terrible warnings. There he says,

For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth [Here one is

¹¹³ 10:03

reminded of what we read in 1 John about sinning deliberately], there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries. A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Again, obviously all of us will on occasion sin after becoming a Christian.¹¹⁴ I think on some occasions we sin deliberately, don't we? We know it's wrong and due to weakness and rebelliousness we sin anyway. He is not talking about that type of sin. Rather, I think that the author is talking about the same thing that he did in chapter 6. If a person commits apostasy, that is to say, he deliberately chooses to reject Christ, to walk away from faith and abandon Christ, then he says there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. That would make sense of why he said before that it is impossible to restore them to repentance again since they crucified the Son of God on their own account. There no longer remains a sacrifice for sin but all that remains, he says, is this fearful prospect of judgment. So he speaks about the man who has spurned the Son of God and proclaimed the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified. He is evidently warning Christians here not to commit apostasy (not to fall away) because God is going to judge. It is, he says, a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

So how, from the Calvinistic perspective, are we to understand these sorts of warnings against apostasy? Typically, the Calvinist will propose two ways of understanding these warnings. First, some Calvinists will say the persons being described here are not really Christians. They are at best nominal Christians – people who are Christians in name only. But they are not genuine, regenerate, born again Christians who have been declared righteous by God. So if you look at Hebrews 6, they will point out that it speaks of these people as having tasted the heavenly gift. They've tasted the goodness of the Word of God. They haven't really drunk it deeply and imbibed it. They just sort of sampled it. Maybe they've been in the context of the Christian congregation or the local church and they benefited from being part of it, they've gone through the motions, but they aren't really genuine, regenerate Christians. For these people to reject Christ, to walk away from him, is simply a continuation of their own unregenerate state and not a matter of someone falling away from the faith.

Other Calvinist theologians have taken a quite different perspective on these passages however. What they point out is that the Holy Spirit uses means to preserve Christians in the faith. He doesn't just zap them so as to make them persevere. Rather, he will use means by which they will persevere. For example, Bible reading, prayer, the preaching of the Word of God, participation in the Lord's Supper, and the exercise of your spiritual gifts in a local fellowship. All of these things would be means that the Holy Spirit might use to help you to persevere in your Christian faith. And these theologians will say one of the means that the Holy Spirit uses to help the elect persevere are precisely these

¹¹⁴ 15:46

warnings. These warnings are the means by which God ensures that the elect will persevere. By putting these frightening warnings in Scripture so that when the elect read them they realize the consequences of walking away from Christ; they therefore will not do so.¹¹⁵

So the warnings are not meant to show that this is a real possibility that you could actually fall away from your faith, but rather they are the very means by which the Holy Spirit ensures that you will not fall away from the faith because you will heed these warnings when you confront them.

So on the Calvinistic perspective, anyone who is a genuine, born again Christian will persevere in the faith. When we see examples of persons – and they are certainly many in our churches and in our society today – who were raised in Christian homes or who were once involved in Christian service or even Christian ministry and have walked away from Christ and turned their backs on him and are now unbelievers (perhaps atheists or agnostics even) the Calvinist will say those persons were never really Christians to begin with. They only were nominally Christian but they weren't genuine Christians. Anyone who is a genuine believer, that is to say a regenerate believer who has been declared righteous by God, that person will guarantee his perseverance in the faith. It is impossible for him to lose salvation.

DISCUSSION

Question: I was just going to point out that there is a verse in 1 John 2:19,

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us.

I believe that that's referring to those who are nominal Christians, maybe in the church, and eventually fall away.

Answer: That is a very good verse for this position. Let me just repeat it so that folks who are taking notes can get that. That was 1 John 2:19. It is very evident, I think, from reading this verse that in the community to which John was writing – in that local church – he was aware that some people had fallen away. It was clear that some had walked away from the faith. But what he says was “even though they went out from us, they were not really of us.” They didn't really belong. If they had really been of us they would have continued. So he is not troubled by these apparent apostates. He would say they really weren't of us.

Followup: I would just say also in Hebrews 6, it is interesting not only – and I'll admit the first part of that chapter is scary – but if you look it turns more positive starting in verse 9. It says, “But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.” It almost sounds like, again, he's talking about those who were in the part of the church that ended up falling away or something like that. But he is not saying that this refers to believers.

Answer: Your point is well spoken from a Calvinistic perspective. You are pointing out that in verse 9 of chapter 6, after issuing these stern warnings the author seems to say, “But even though I said these things, still I’m optimistic about you. Better things that belong to salvation are characteristic of you.” So he seems to be confident that the persons to whom he is writing will not, in fact, fall away.

Question: I had a question about Hebrews 6. The Calvinist that would say that that passage is describing someone who was maybe a nominal Christian, what about in verse 4, my version says, “And have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.” How would a Calvinist deal with that?

Answer: Yeah, I think we have to say with every good will that the Calvinist really has to tone down these words to not give them their full weight: the idea of “tasting” as meaning just a kind of sort of nibbling, being a “partaker of the Holy Spirit” to say that simply means maybe you are in the community of the people of God where the Holy Spirit is active and working or he has been working in your life and he’s convicting you and drawing you to him or that you’ve tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come. The Calvinist has to read those expressions in this sort of lowest common denominator in order to get those to be descriptive of a true non-believer.¹¹⁶ Whether or not you think that that is a plausible interpretation will probably depend on how persuasive you would find the Arminian perspective when I share that.

Question: Does the Calvinist interpretation of, say, the apostasy passage need some sort of determinism in order to make this work? Or can the Calvinist hold to libertarian free will and still hold to this interpretation?

Answer: Did you get the question he’s asking? He is saying, “Isn’t the Calvinistic perspective rooted in something deeper here, namely, a view of divine providence that excludes human freedom all together?” If the work of salvation is unilateral on God’s part – he predestines whom he is going to save, he saves them, he justifies them, he will sanctify and preserve them – then really it is not possible to fall away because everything is causally determined. I think that is correct. I think from a consistent Calvinistic point of view this is a causally determined process. So it is impossible for the elect to fall away because the elect aren’t free. They just do whatever God causes them to do. But I haven’t appealed to that because I want to leave this perspective more widely open to Christians like Baptists who may not be determinists and Calvinists but nevertheless still believe in “eternal security” or perseverance of the saints on the basis of passages like those that we read. These passages that we’ve read don’t say anything about determinism, do they? They just assure the flock of Jesus that God the Father will keep them, that no one will snatch them out of his hand, that they will be kept by the power of God until the last day when he will raise them up. So I think that while the traditional Calvinist is a determinist, in order to believe in the perseverance of the saints you don’t have to be a determinist. You can just believe in it on the basis of promises like the ones that we’ve read.

Question: Coming out of the PCA church, this has been a raging debate for centuries. I think though one thing I keep focusing on is: think about Judas. Judas Iscariot. Judas was chosen by Christ to be one of the apostles, correct? He followed him through thick and

¹¹⁶ 25:04

thin. He went through difficult times for him. However, at the end, he had doubt and chose himself to deny Christ. In my way of thinking, you can say, “Well, he was never a Christian” or, I guess the point I’m trying to make, those that fall away have consciously made a decision to turn away. It is not like “Oops, I sinned so I’m going to hell.” I guess I don’t want to paint the picture that if you sin then God is going to zap you and you are going to hell. But these people in my view have chosen to deny Christ such as some that you debate that said that they were in the church and they came to a point where they no longer believed that. So, again, it is what is going on within the mind and where the heart really is. If, on the other hand, you accept Christ, you are totally committed to that decision, it is not those that say they are Christian, they go to church, and they do pretty good. It is a whole different experience. [*inaudible*] to view as Savior, but also Lord. It says you don’t just know who I am. The devil knows who I am and admits you are the Son of God. It is not just that acknowledgement. But it is who you serve. And as you are serving him, yes you may fall but you are still clinging to that hope. I just want to sort of tweak it to not appear that God is still sitting as judge and warning us that if you slip you are going to hell, and you weren’t part of us.

Answer: Yes, a nice contrast to Judas Iscariot would be Peter. Peter denied Christ three times. But Peter evidently was still a man of deep faith and conviction, and he repented and turned again, and God greatly used Peter as a leader in the church even though he stumbled. Judas, by contrast, apparently fell away and never came back.¹¹⁷ He is called the Son of Perdition. So when we talk about apostasy here, it is important to understand your point – that we are not talking here about a Christian who is, say, living in carnality because maybe he has been infected by materialism or you’ve got lust in your heart or a bad temper. You’ve got anger that hasn’t been dealt with. Nobody thinks that in order to be saved you have to be living a perfect, sinless life. The Christian life is a progression in sanctification until we go home. We are talking here about someone who would make, like Judas, a deliberate, conscious repudiation of Christ, having formerly claimed to know him and follow him and to walk away from Christ.

Followup: Just one other quick point. Those that go to church and say they are a Christian, to me, they may go on sinning and think, well at the end I’ll pray and I’ll be forgiven and I’ll go to heaven. I don’t view that group as truly the committed Christian. They think they are; they say they are. If you were to poll America, 90% or 95% believe in God and probably – what? – 75% say they are Christian. But do you really think that is the right number?

Answer: I’m glad you made that point. I don’t want to be misunderstood. So let me issue a corrective to maybe a misunderstanding. The Calvinist theologian does not think that if you claim to be a Christian and you are living a life of sin and there is no sanctification in your life, there is no difference, he does not think you should have a false sense of security that you are going to be saved. On the contrary, the Calvinist theologian will say, “If you show no fruit of genuine regeneration then the chances are you are still a non-Christian, even though you think you are a Christian.” So there is no false sense of security that is to be given here to the Christian believer who has a lackadaisical attitude toward sin and says, “Oh, God will forgive me. Where sin abounds, grace much more

¹¹⁷ 30:10

abounds.” He doesn’t worry about sin in his life. He continues to live for self. The Calvinist will say to him that you should tremble because you may not really be a Christian at all, and you have no right to a sense of security if you are not living for Christ. So even for the Calvinist, as for the Arminian, the assurance of salvation properly belongs to the person who is living a life that is worthy of Christ – not a perfect life, as I said, but a life that is advancing in holiness and being conformed to the image of Christ as he goes through life. If there is no fruit, if there is no sanctification, then that person has no right to a false sense of security of his salvation.

That brings us to the end of our time. Next time we will look at the Arminian perspective on the question of perseverance.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Total Running Time: 33:56 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 14

Perseverance of the Saints (Arminianism)

We are talking about the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints which is sometimes known in popular piety as “eternal security.” The question we are asking is: can a genuinely regenerate Christian lose his salvation, or is it impossible for a person who has been saved to lose his salvation? Last time we looked at the Calvinistic perspective, or the Reformed perspective, on this question. We saw that according to Calvinism a person cannot lose his salvation. Once a person has been regenerated and declared righteous by God, that person can never fall away and therefore is eternally secure. If you see someone who, despite having been an ostensibly authentic Christian (someone who was active in the Christian church, in ministry even), who falls away from the faith, the Calvinist will say that person was really only a nominal Christian (a Christian in name only). That person wasn’t really a regenerate Christian. He is and always has been an unbeliever, an unregenerate person. He only appeared to be a Christian believer and therefore has not really fallen away from faith or lost salvation. He never had it to begin with.

Arminianism

Today we are going to look at a quite different perspective, which can be characterized as the Arminian perspective, on this question, after Jacob Arminius.

The Elect Are Corporately Secure

The Arminian maintains that it is possible for a person who is a born again Christian to lose his salvation and go to perdition. What the Arminian will typically say is that the elect of God are corporately secure. You will remember that when we talked about the doctrine of election, in contrast to the Calvinist the Arminian construes election as primarily corporate in nature and only secondarily individual. That is to say the primary subject or object of God’s election is a corporate body: a people, a church. It is that corporate group which is destined for sanctification, conformity to the image of Christ, and ultimately glorification and heaven. But it is up to the individual whether he wants to be a part of that elect corporate group or not. If you place your faith in Christ then you are part of that elect group and so in a secondary sense predestined and elect of God. The primary object of election is this corporate body and you by identifying yourself with it through faith in Christ become in a secondary sense elect or predestined.

Now, as such in line with that teaching, what the Arminian thinks is that this corporate group is going to persevere and will never fail to obtain its promises. The corporate group is secure in salvation. But, just as individuals will become members of the group by placing their faith in Christ, so they can fall away from the group by rejecting Christ; by apostatizing and ceasing to have faith in Christ and repudiating Christ they then are no longer members of this elect group and thereby forfeit their salvation.

On the corporate nature of election and security, look at Romans 8:33-39.¹¹⁹ Here Paul

¹¹⁹ 4:44

says,

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For thy sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Arminian takes this to be a passage about the corporate body of the elect; that the elect are secure in God's salvation and so these promises will never be abrogated. They are secure and safe.

The Individual's Perseverance is Contingent

But the individual [*inaudible*] for salvation or perseverance is contingent.

Look, for example, at Romans 11:17-32. In this passage, Paul has a very interesting combination of what appears to be a corporate image and an individual image. He compares Israel to a cultivated olive tree which represents God's elect. Then he thinks of individuals as branches that can be grafted onto this olive tree. The natural branches of this cultivated olive tree would be the Jewish people. Gentiles he compares to branches that have been taken off of a wild olive tree and then grafted into the cultivated olive tree and thereby they become heirs to all of the promises and the blessings that belong to Israel. The promises and the blessings are given to Israel (represented by this cultivated olive tree), but these branches cut off of wild olive trees are grafted into the trunk of the cultivated olive tree and therefore come to share in its blessings. Let's read, with that in mind, Romans 11:17-32.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off. And even the others, if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

“The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;
“and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.”

As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.

What Paul seems to be saying here, the Arminian will say, is that this corporate tree (this tree representing God’s elect church) is composed both of Jews and Gentiles.¹²⁰ The Jews have in many cases been broken off – the branches were dead. Why? Because of their unbelief. Because of their unbelief these branches were stripped away and in their place believing Gentiles have been grafted into the olive tree to share its blessings. But he says that is no reason to be proud you Gentile believers because if you do not continue in faith then you too will be broken off just like those natural branches that were unbelieving were broken off. He says there is still hope that these natural branches might be grafted back in again. Indeed he thinks that in the future all of Israel will be saved. After the full number of Gentiles come in then Israel will turn back to Christ again and so be saved. So you see here a combination of a kind of corporate election and security that a person has insofar as he remains grafted into Christ. But if through unbelief one falls away then one will be broken off and have no security.

Let’s turn to our representative Arminian theologian Robert Shank whom I’ve quoted before in his book *Elect in the Son* to hear his take on this relationship between corporate election and individual contingency. He writes on page 49 of *Elect in the Son*,

The possibility of apostasy posits the corporate nature of the election.

The Scriptures bear witness to actual instances of apostasy and abound with solemn warnings against the peril, which (contrary to the assumptions of some) is real rather than hypothetical.¹²¹

Consider the following passages. Here are some Scriptures that Shank quotes. First he says consider these Scriptures showing God’s eternal purposes in grace. Ephesians 1:4, “He chose us in Christ that we should be holy and blameless before him.” Colossians 1:22, “He reconciled us to himself in Christ through his death to present us holy and blameless before him.” So Shank would interpret God’s eternal purpose in grace, this corporate election, is that he has chosen this corporate group to be holy and blameless before him. This is God’s eternal purpose in grace; this is his design to have a people peculiar to himself who will be holy and blameless before him.

¹²⁰ 10:30

¹²¹ Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), p. 49.

This intention, or purpose of God, is fulfilled corporately. Consider Ephesians 5:27, “Christ will present the *ekklesia* [that is to say the church, the body of Christ], to Himself holy and blameless.” So God’s eternal purpose is fulfilled in the case of the church. The church will be presented by Christ holy and blameless before him.

But, Shank says, insofar as the individual believer is concerned, this is contingent upon his perseverance in the faith. Colossians 1:23 says, “He will present us holy and blameless before Him – if we continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.” In the case of the individual this salvation is conditional. It is contingent. God’s eternal purpose in grace that we should be holy and blameless before him will be fulfilled in individuals says Colossians 1:23 – “He will present us holy and blameless before Him – if we continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.”

Warnings Against Apostasy

So the Arminian takes these warnings in Scripture against committing apostasy very seriously and at face value.¹²² It really is possible for regenerate Christians to fall away from Christ and so lose salvation. Let’s look again at some of those warnings and others that we considered last time.

First, these warnings, the Arminian will point out, are written to Christian believers. These persons to whom the warnings are addressed are not merely nominal Christians. These are not people who are in fact unsaved. These are Christian believers to whom these warnings are addressed. Look at the book of Hebrews for example. The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who, under the threat of persecution, were tempted to renounce Christ and go back to Judaism. They were tempted to revert to Judaism to avoid the terrible persecution they were enduring. This leads the author of the book of Hebrews to issue these very stern warnings to them about doing such a thing.

Hebrews 3:1 describes his readers as “holy brethren who share in a heavenly call” and he invites them to consider Jesus “the apostle and high priest of our confession.” So he refers to them as holy brethren; he says they share in this heavenly call.

Look down at verse 6 of chapter 3. He says, “Christ was faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope.” Here he says that we are indwelt by Christ. We are the temple of Christ. He lives in us. We are his house. But he says this is the case only if we hold fast to our confidence and pride in our hope.

Look then at verses 12 to 14. He says,

Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.

There it seems again clear he is writing to fellow Christian – brethren he calls them – and says that we share in Christ. But he warns them that we share in Christ only if we hold

¹²² 15:12

fast to the end.

Finally, turn over to Hebrews 10:32-36. Here he says,

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised.

Clearly this is a passage written to fellow Christians. He says that “you were enlightened” and then you endured affliction. He says “you knew that you had a better possession and an abiding possession” in heaven. So don’t throw this away; you need to endure.

So when we look at these warnings, the Arminian would say, these are warnings to us. These are warnings that are clearly given to regenerate Christians, not to people who are in fact unregenerate. When we read them in that light then it seems clear that they entail the real possibility of falling away from Christ and so losing salvation.¹²³ Look again at Hebrews 3:12-19. The author says,

Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end, while it is said,

“Today, when you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? And with whom was he provoked forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they should never enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Because of that he warns them to be sure that there is not an unbelieving heart within you, an evil, unbelieving heart that will lead you to fall away from God.

Turn over to Hebrews 6:1-8. He says,

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to

¹²³ 19:43

come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.

The Arminian will point out that this description is surely a description of a regenerate Christian. Notice what it says about this person who falls away. It says this is a person who has once been enlightened. This is the same word that is used in Hebrews 10:32 to describe the recipients of the book of Hebrews where he says, “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.” He is describing how they became Christians. So to say that they are enlightened or that this person has been enlightened is to say that this person has become a regenerate Christian.

It says that this person has “tasted” the heavenly gift and has “tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come.” When you think of the idiom of tasting, this doesn’t mean just sort of having a little sample but not really imbibing it. Look how the author uses the same word in Hebrews 2:9 to describe Christ’s death on our behalf. It says, “But we see Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.” Now clearly, Christ, in tasting death, meant he died. He experienced death, not just that he sort of had a little sampling of it. He was dead. While that may be a peculiar idiom to taste death as an expression for dying, similarly to say that these people had tasted the goodness of the word of God, the powers of the age to come, and the heavenly gift, I think is to say they have imbibed salvation.

Notice also that it says they have become partakers of the Holy Spirit. Now, again, this same word is used in Hebrews 3:14. There he says, “For we share in Christ, [in the Greek, it is the same word – we are partakers in Christ] if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.” So to be a partaker in the Holy Spirit is like being a partaker in Christ – one shares in Christ, one shares in the Holy Spirit.¹²⁴ This is a description of a regenerate believer. So the description of the person here, I think, is clearly intended to be a description of a regenerate believer who then apostatizes and rejects Christ out of his life.

I think it has been rightly said that if the Reformed theologian is saying that this can be a description of someone who is not a regenerate Christian then none of us has assurance of salvation because how could you have any more potent a description of a Christian than this. If a person can be like this and not be saved, how can any of us have assurance that we are in fact elect and are saved? So paradoxically enough, by interpreting that passage to not be about regenerate Christians I think is to rob us of the assurance of our salvation that is rightly ours. It belongs to us as we share in Christ.

Finally, look over at Hebrews 10:26-31:

For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth [I think he is talking about the sin of apostasy, of rejecting Christ], there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will

¹²⁴ 25:13

consume the adversaries. A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Notice here the person that is being described is someone who spurns Christ and thereby profanes Christ’s blood by which he was sanctified. This was a person who was sanctified by the blood of Christ. It says he has “outraged the Spirit of grace.” Remember we saw in Hebrews 6 that this is a person who was a partaker of the Holy Spirit. Now by rejecting Christ out of his life he outrages the Holy Spirit. This calls to mind the unpardonable sin – doesn’t it? – of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Christ said all sins shall be forgiven except for one, namely, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Could it be that apostasy is a form of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? It is to outrage the Spirit of grace by which we are sanctified by casting Christ out of one’s life. He says there is no more sacrifice for a person who has done that. He’s lost. There is no hope now for him. That would make sense of why blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would be unpardonable – because there remains no more sacrifice for such a sin.

If this is right, what you suddenly find when you read the New Testament is that it is filled with warnings like this. Maybe you never noticed them before until you begin to read them in this light. Look for example at 2 Peter 2:20-22.

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire.

What an incredible image here of the apostate person.¹²⁵ He says it would be better that they never, ever knew the way of salvation than having known it, having come to a knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to turn back from it. He compares them to a dog that eats its own vomit or a pig that is washed from the slop and then jumps back into it again and wallows in the mire. That is certainly a powerful image.

Look at John 15 which is the words of Jesus. John 15:1-6. This is the famous parable of the vine and the branches. Jesus says,

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much

¹²⁵ 30:23

fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.

Here you have this same corporate image of the vine which is Christ's people and then the individual branches. The branches that do not abide in the vine wither up and die and they are thrown away. They are burned; they are good for nothing. It is the branches that remain in the vine, attached to it, that bear fruit and abide in Christ the vine.

From what I've said, on an Arminian perspective it isn't a matter of sort of slipping in and out of salvation by sin. Rather, we are talking here about this very, very serious sin of apostasy. That is to say someone who renounces Christ and rejects him out of his life and walks away from Christ in a very deliberate and conscious way. There are examples in Scripture of people who do this, and I'm sure we all know examples of Christians that we've known or even ministers that we've known who have done this in their own lives. So we are not talking here about slipping in and out of salvation by your daily living. We are talking here about whether or not it is possible to commit this very serious sin of apostasy.

When we see someone who is a backslidden Christian; that is to say, a Christian who isn't living for Christ, he is not abiding in Christ, he's walking according to the flesh, he is carnal as Paul would say in 1 Corinthians, we can't know if that person is apostate or not. Only God knows his heart. We should always assume that he hasn't crossed that line of no return and try to bring him back. Look at James 5:19-20. James says,

My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and some one brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Here James is talking about one of the brethren – not a non-believer – who wanders away from the truth and then other Christians bring him back to faith. He says you will save his soul from death. He was on a slippery slide to perdition, and God managed through your ministry in his life to bring him back and to save his soul and cover a multitude of sins.¹²⁶ So don't ever give up on a backslidden or apparently apostate Christian because we never really know. We only see the externals. I think in line with what James says, we should always assume that it is possible for that person to come back to Christ and so try to bring him back.

That would represent an Arminian perspective on this problem.

DISCUSSION

Question: Is there any way that a person can become an apostate without realizing it themselves? Can they lose their salvation and not be aware of it?

Answer: I don't think so. It says in Hebrews if we sin *deliberately* after coming to a knowledge of the truth. He is talking there about someone who he says spurns the Son of God. Imagine an early Jewish Christian who maybe has his goods looted and his family is

¹²⁶ 35:03

beaten up. He's tempted under persecution to renounce Christ and go back to Judaism. I think that is what he is talking about. A person who makes a deliberate, conscious decision to no longer follow Christ and have faith in him.

Question: So if a person had wickedness (they were very sinful in their lives) that wouldn't necessarily accumulate to a point that they would go into apostasy.

Answer: I don't think necessarily though I would say – and here the Calvinist will agree with me – a person like that has no assurance of salvation. Someone whose life shows no fruit in that way is like the person that James described who says “I have faith” but that faith is dead. Can that kind of faith save you? And remember James says, “No, that kind of faith is worthless.” So the person who says, “I went forward when I was eight years old in an evangelistic service and I made a commitment” but now he lives in utter indifference to God, both the Calvinist and the Arminian would say that person should tremble before God. He has no basis for confidence in his salvation. He may not be a Christian at all. But I don't think that someone who is struggling to live the Christian life and who flounders and fails is going to necessarily accumulate enough sin to commit apostasy, though it could. It could happen. The author of Hebrews says, “Watch out lest there be in any of you this evil, unbelieving heart.” I don't think that a person just decides to commit apostasy one day. It is going to be an accumulation – isn't it? – of growing coldness of heart, maybe first thing you do is not go to church anymore, or maybe not pray. You don't feel like praying anymore. Your prayer life dries up. You don't read the Bible anymore. Little by little this sort of evil, unbelieving heart can creep in. So in that sense it could be a cumulative thing, the sort of slippery slope.

Question: I am not a Calvinist but I don't believe you can lose your salvation. I see perseverance, like works, as being evidentiary of salvation but not determinative of it. Otherwise, we deserve some credit for it. I say, well, Christ died on the cross, he saved me, but I persevered, so I deserve some credit for my salvation which is of course proscribed by Ephesians 2:8-9. I would cite John 6:39 where it states that it is the will of the Father that Christ shall lose not even one (is what the Greek says) which speaks against the corporate idea. It says he will lose not even one; will present him to the Father and the last day. Now this seems to me like this is a fiduciary responsibility created here in which Christ, if he does not deliver in the last day all that the Father has given him, will be outside the will of God which I would see is impossible. Also Philippians 1:6 saying being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Then in John 10:28 the famous “no one can snatch them out of my hand.” Well, if you can lose your salvation, I'd say Satan has snatched you out of his hand. Then you go to Jude 1 which it says the called are kept by Jesus Christ.¹²⁷ Now that is echoed in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 where Paul says “may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless; the one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” That is, keep you blameless. In other words, God is going to keep you from falling away is my interpretation of that. Finally, in the doxology in Jude 24, “Praise to him who is able to keep you from falling.” So to me these verses just make an overwhelming argument that once saved, always saved.

Answer: I think that is the question: are they overwhelming? Certainly there are texts that

¹²⁷ 40:02

could be cited on both sides, and I cited some of those very texts when we looked at the Calvinist perspective last week. So the question is: where does the balance lie because there certainly is a tension here? It seems to me that the Arminian has a very, very powerful case that these warnings are real and do show the possibility of failing to persevere. Therefore it is certainly true that no one is able to snatch a person out of Christ's hand, for example. But a person can, himself, jump out of Christ's hand. He can leave himself by losing faith. Does this imply that he therefore merits his salvation? Well, no, because it is simply a matter of continuing to have faith in Christ and faith isn't a meritorious work. Faith is the opposite of works. It is only insofar as we continue to believe in Christ that we have those promises that we can claim. When Christ says that "I shall lose none that the Father has given me" I think probably the Arminian would say ultimately speaking the apostate is not one of those who has been given to Christ. The apostate in the final story is not one of those. So, although there are certainly these passages on the other side, I guess I am sort of persuaded by the Arminian passages that we looked at today that these are so serious that we need to interpret the ones that you've cited in light of those and say, in the words of one of my Arminian friends, certainly I believe in the eternal security *of the believer*. The *believer* is eternally secure. The *believer* will not fall away. But if you cease to be a believer then you are not secure and you don't have these promises to claim.

Followup: I've been through these passages, of course, over the years many times that you've presented in support of the Arminian view. I can rationalize every one of them by saying that that person was never saved to begin with. Perhaps the most serious of that was Hebrews 6 where, as you correctly pointed out, we are talking about saved people there. There's no question about that. What I think we are not talking about is loss of salvation. I think what we are talking about is loss of the things that accompany salvation as listed in verse 9 down there. I think it says your works will be burned up. I don't believe that is perdition; I just think it means you lose your reward from that standpoint.

Answer: OK. Well, let's take a look at it. When you look at Hebrews 6 and 10 together it seems to me that there he is talking about a person who has now committed a sin for which there no longer remains any sacrifice and who will be subjected to God's vengeance.

Followup: Notice verse 8 – he has an analogy of a land that produces thorns and thistles. As we said the land is not destroyed, the salvation is not lost, the fruit is destroyed. Notice in verse 9 he says even though we speak like this dear friends we have confidence of better things in your case, things that accompany salvation. That is the fruits, the rewards, of salvation. You have lost those rewards.

Answer: I don't see verse 9 as relevant to the question of whether or not it is possible for these Hebrew believers to fall away which is what we are considering. Certainly this author has confidence that the people to whom he is writing are going to endure. They are going to head his warnings.¹²⁸ So he says I'm confident you are going to do alright. But the question would be: could they fall away? That is the issue.

Followup: I would just simply say that these people that supposedly fall away were never

¹²⁸ 45:01

really saved.

Answer: Yeah, I know. That's what we talked about last time. But here you did say you think it is talking about Christians but it is not talking about their ultimate destruction, just the burning up of their works.

Followup: No, just the loss of the things that accompany salvation.

We are out of time but we will continue this next time. We will take it up again. There is more to be said.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Total Running Time: 46:01 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

§ VIII. DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 15

Assessment of the Competing Views on Perseverance

We've been thinking about the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and last time we looked at an Arminian perspective on this doctrine. We saw that in Arminian theology election is regarded as primarily corporate and only secondarily individual insofar as the individual chooses to align himself with that elect corporate body. Accordingly the elect corporately are secure. God's church will be brought to sanctification, glorification, and eternal life, but individually salvation, sanctification, and glorification is not guaranteed. That depends upon the believer maintaining his faith in Christ and continuing to be part of that elect body. Should the believer apostatize or reject Christ or cease to believe, he falls away from grace and accordingly forfeits salvation and is no longer part of that elect body which is secure through faith.

Today I would like to share some assessment of the competing views that we've looked at (Calvinism and Arminianism) with respect to the perseverance of the saints. We've seen that there is an apparent conflict between various texts in the New Testament on this subject. There are certainly texts that speak of the security of the individual believer – that he will persevere to the end and that he cannot fall away from salvation. On the other hand, we have these equally clear texts that warn seriously about the dangers of apostasy and falling from grace and forfeiting salvation. So the question is: how do you best account for this apparent conflict between these two streams of biblical teaching?

One could just say that the biblical authors disagreed about this subject. That John, for example, who often writes about the eternal security of the believer in Christ, disagreed with (or would disagree with, if he could speak with him) the author of the book of Hebrews who clearly thought that Christians could apostatize and fall away from grace and be lost. So these biblical authors simply disagreed on the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

But apart from the theological problems of saying that the Bible contains contradictory teaching on this subject, the problem with this solution is that these conflicting texts are not simply found between different authors in the New Testament, they are found within the same author on this subject in the New Testament. For example, the apostle Paul. Some of the most important texts about the security and perseverance of the believer are written by Paul, but at the same time we also saw the many warnings that Paul issues. The fact that branches could be broken off of that olive tree that represented the elect body of believers if they failed to maintain faith in Christ. So I think that this conflict that apparently exists is probably more apparent than real since Paul would not be in conflict with himself.

I suspect that we have here a situation rather like the apparent conflict that exists between Paul and James on the subject of justification by faith alone. There we saw that there seemed to be a surface conflict between Paul and James, but in fact if you probe deeper it is very likely that if Paul and James were to sit down together and discuss this they would agree – that a faith which does not issue in good works is a dead, sterile faith that will not

save and that genuine saving faith is inevitably accompanied by good works which are evidence of genuine faith. So there is no real conflict between Paul and James on this subject.¹³⁰ I could imagine a similar dialogue taking place between the author of the Gospel of John and the author of the book of Hebrews in settling their apparent differences on this subject.

As I look at their respective texts and what they have to say about this subject, it seems to me that it is much more likely that John would say, “Well, I didn’t mean that no one could ever apostatize when I said that ‘no one is able to snatch them out of my hand’ or that ‘all that the Father gives me will come to me.’ I wasn’t thinking about apostasy when I wrote that. I wouldn’t disagree with you.” I think that it is more likely that John would say that than that the author of the book of Hebrews would say, “Well, I didn’t really imagine that Christians could apostatize. I wasn’t really talking about Christians when I said that these people who have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, and the power of the age to come could fall away.” It seems to me that the warnings in the book of Hebrews are so clear and so unambiguous that they simply can’t be explained away in that manner – by saying that the persons to whom the author wrote or the persons he is talking about aren’t genuine Christians.

I read this week a very interesting article on perseverance given to me by someone in the class by a contemporary Calvinist theologian of some prominence, Thomas Schreiner, who teaches at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.¹³¹ It was striking that Schreiner, who is himself a Calvinist, agrees that these warnings in the New Testament are so clear and so unambiguous that they can’t be explained away in that way. He says that he would in fact himself be an Arminian if he did not already believe in the doctrine of unconditional election. This is what he writes on page 58 of his article “Perseverance and Assurance:”

If I were not convinced of unconditional election, I would surely be an Arminian. The warning passages are so strong that I can understand why many think that believers can lose their salvation. What is interesting to me is that there are so many believers who reject unconditional election and yet they hold on to eternal security.

Obviously, he is thinking there of many of his Baptist brethren who reject the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election and yet want to continue to hold to eternal security. Schreiner says that sort of position just doesn’t make sense because these warning passages are so clear and unambiguous that if you take them at face value they indicate that falling away is possible unless you already are committed to a Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election. Of course then that is to simply throw the issue back onto another subject and we already discussed the doctrine of election in previous classes. You may remember that I gave a Molinist perspective on that doctrine that I think makes good sense of the doctrine of election. So not being committed to the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election, I find myself agreeing with Schreiner that these warnings are so

¹³⁰ 5:02

¹³¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and a Proposal,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, Spring 1998, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 32-62. See http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/2.1_article.pdf (accessed April 8, 2014).

clear that one really ought to be an Arminian and think that apostasy is possible.

Schreiner himself adopts the view that the warnings are the means by which God guarantees perseverance. You'll remember we saw that some Calvinist theologians think that by giving these warnings these are the very means by which God ensures that the elect will persevere and therefore cannot fall away. But it seems to me that here the Calvinist, and Schreiner in particular, is confusing two quite distinct questions:

1. *Will* any elect person fall away.
2. *Can* an elect person fall away?

These are two very distinct questions that are often conflated by the Calvinist.¹³² The first question is a *de facto* question – is it in fact the case that any elect people *will* fall from grace and lose salvation? Will that happen? That is a *de facto* question. The second question is a modal question. That is to say it is about what can or cannot happen. Is it *possible* for an elect person to fall away? Not that any will, perhaps; maybe no one will. But nevertheless it is possible. *Can* an elect person lose his salvation?

These two questions are very distinct and can be answered differently by the theologian. Schreiner confuses these two questions on page 52 of his article. There he asks, “How can an individual, though, at the same time be assured that he will never apostatize, and also believe that he may commit apostasy?” That is very easy to explain because one is a modal question and the other is a *de facto* question. To give an illustration, let's suppose that Thomas Schreiner *will* never commit adultery. He will go to his grave a chaste and pure man. He will never commit adultery. Does it therefore follow that he *cannot* commit the sin of adultery? Obviously not. In fact, God could assure Schreiner that he will never commit adultery. We can imagine God giving him a prophetic word that, “You will not commit adultery. You will stay true to me and chaste until the end.” Does that mean that Schreiner will therefore be incapable of committing adultery? Obviously not. He *can* commit adultery, but he *won't*. He is able to – the modal question – but the *de facto* question is that he won't.

Perhaps what you are seeing here is that beneath the surface and surfacing now is this old debate between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. This fatalistic idea that if God knows what will happen then everything happens necessarily. We dealt with this in our treatment of divine omniscience where we saw that that equation is simply logically fallacious. Even if God knows that you will not apostatize, it doesn't follow that you cannot apostatize. You could apostatize but you won't. So God's assuring you that you will not is in no way incompatible with your ability to fall away.

In this light, consider the interpretation that the Calvinist gives of the warning against apostasy as the means by which God guarantees the perseverance of the elect. I submit that all this gives us is that the elect *will* not fall away, but it does not show that they *cannot* fall away. In fact, quite the contrary, what this view presupposes is that the person can fall away, but through giving him these warnings God ensures that he will in fact persevere. So the warnings view – that is to say interpreting the warnings as the means by which God brings about perseverance – actually presupposes that the elect can fall away. Otherwise, why give the warnings? Right? If it is impossible for the elect to fall away,

¹³² 10:27

why give them warnings? The warnings are superfluous on such a view.¹³³ But if you say that the warnings are the means by which God ensures perseverance then what you are saying is that the elect can fall away – they can apostatize – but God gave these warnings to them so that, sobered by the stark warnings that they hear, they in fact will endure to the end and be saved.

So on this view God knows that if he were to give these warnings then the elect would heed them and persevere. The elect can fall away but they won't because God knows that if they were to receive these warnings then they would heed the warnings and so persevere. Now, that is not Calvinism, is it? What view is that? (There must be somebody here who recognizes this!) Molinism! That's right! It's Molinism! So this view of the warnings as the means of guaranteeing perseverance is really a Molinist perspective on perseverance, not a Calvinistic perspective. What the Molinist could say is that God knows what gifts of grace, what warnings, what Scriptural admonitions are necessary in order to ensure the free perseverance of the elect and their ultimate salvation. So it seems to me that this view actually is not a Calvinistic view at all. It really is a hidden Molinist view in disguise as a Calvinistic view.

I would say, therefore, that I think the Scripture teaches that an elect person can fall away. I think that is the import of these warnings. Whether or not you think that any elect person will fall away is probably going to depend not on those warning passages but how you regard the examples in Scripture of people like Judas,¹³⁴ or Demas (whom Paul says has left me, he's in love with the world, and he's gone back),¹³⁵ or Hymenaeus and Alexander (who has made shipwreck of their faith).¹³⁶ There are a number of people who are apparent apostates in the New Testament. Whether or not you think that these people actually are elect people who fell away will determine how you judge issues of that sort.

So, in my view, it seems to me that the view that makes the best sense of both of these streams of scriptural teaching is to say that the elect can fall away, they can apostatize and lose their salvation, but that God will do what lies within his power to give them warnings and admonitions and gifts of grace so as to ensure that they will, in fact, persevere to the end and be saved.

DISCUSSION

Question: I think the problem here is to define what it means to fall away. I think what Hebrews is talking about is people being unproductive. This ties in with 1 Corinthians. It says their crop is likely to be burned, not them. It says let's not lay the foundation of salvation by faith and the fundamentals of the Gospel but go on to other things and still be productive, which starts in chapter 6. I think the falling away is to be unproductive. To be shipwrecked for the faith means to be unproductive; it doesn't mean you are going to lose your salvation.

Answer: I just, honestly, think that that is far too milk-toast an interpretation of these

¹³³ 15:03

¹³⁴ cf. Matthew 26:14-16

¹³⁵ cf. 2 Timothy 4:10

¹³⁶ cf. 1 Timothy 1:19-20

passages. When you read these passages in Hebrews it is talking about a person who tramples underfoot the Son of God, who crucifies him anew, who outrages the Spirit of grace, and he says there is no more sacrifice left for sin for such a person. I was noticing this morning during the pastor's sermon when we came to Hebrews 10:39 it says, "We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls." So this is not just a matter of just being unfruitful or losing your good works or having your bad works burned up.¹³⁷ He's talking here about people who, as he says, are destroyed, who lose their souls. So I am just not persuaded that that does justice to the seriousness of these passages.

Followup: I'll have to look at 10. I was just commenting on 6. But Hebrews is written to the Hebrews. When it is talking about people who have received Christ but come from that background, he says you can't go back to the law or these types of things. I think that is why he's saying you are crucifying Christ against and putting him to open shame because you are trying to go back to something that isn't there.

Answer: Right. We talked about that. I don't think you were here maybe a lecture or two ago. We talked about that – how the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who, under the threat of persecution, were tempted to go back to Judaism, and this author warns them, "Don't do that or you will destroy your souls." It is the same warnings that you have in the book of Galatians where Paul warns the Galatians who are under the influence of these Judaizers from going back under the law. He says if you do that you have fallen away from grace; you have fallen away from Christ.¹³⁸ Paul warns them in just the most severe terms. He says, "If I or even an angel from heaven should preach to you a different Gospel than the one I preach let him be anathema – let him go to hell – because this is so serious."¹³⁹ I think Paul, like the author of Hebrews, is concerned for the souls of these persons who are tempted to apostatize and revert back, in this case, to Judaism.

Question: Three quick comments. It seems to me the best argument for the view that you cannot apostatize would be to argue that justification, once it occurs, cannot be reversed. It is a process that, once you are justified, you cannot undo that. An analogy (not argument, but analogy) is in law. A person could die and give you a gift via a will. The gift is vested at the time of death; nevertheless you can renounce the gift. The process could be undone.

Answer: So just to understand, this is a case where you have a legal declaration that could be undone or rejected by the individual who is legally declared the heir.

Followup: Yes. The gift is vested in the heir, and the heir could still renounce the gift. The second comment I was going to mention is the parable of the sower. The seed that falls on the rocky soil – Jesus says in one of the accounts (in Luke 8, I think it is) that those are people who hear the Word, receive it with joy, "believe for a while," and then fall away.¹⁴⁰ It seems pretty clear that that is a warning from the lips of Jesus that you can fall away.

¹³⁷ 20:07

¹³⁸ cf. Galatians 5:2-4

¹³⁹ cf. Galatians 1:8-9

¹⁴⁰ cf. Luke 8:13

Answer: Let me comment on that before we move on. I think you are right in drawing attention to the parable of the sower. The person who doesn't think this is possible has to say that all of those other soils are non-believers, that they are not really Christians. Yet, Jesus does seem to represent them as Christians, doesn't he? He says they believe but then the cares of this world and the desire for other things choke out the Word and they die.

Followup: In the parable of the sower – this goes to the earlier point – there is a distinction between the rocky soil and the soil that is covered with thorns and then the productive soil. In the latter two cases it refers to the productivity of the seed. The seed that falls among the thorns become unproductive, but the seed that falls on the rocky soil springs to life, grows, and it dies out. Jesus says in Luke 8 that that is a person who believes for a while and then falls away. So it seems to me pretty clear. The last comment is it appears to me that two of the problems of arguing against these warnings, in other words saying they are not real, is: number one you could provide false assurance of salvation to people, and number two, if we argue something that is not supported by Scripture, it seems to me we undermine our credibility.¹⁴¹ For example, when I was a small kid growing up in Atlanta I was taught that the Bible condemns drinking alcohol. As I started reading the Bible I saw that wasn't true. If we argue that it is impossible to apostatize, even though Scripture warns against it, it seems to me we hurt our credibility.

Answer: My concern, too, frankly, is if we interpret these warning passages in Hebrews as descriptive of non-Christians then it will rob all of us of assurance of salvation. Because if a person who fits *that* description can be unregenerate then who is to say that *you* are not unregenerate? That you are elect? If that description is of a non-Christian then it robs us all of assurance, I think. I think that the better view of the warnings would be not that they are of non-believers but that these are the means by which God works the perseverance of the elect. By warning them, for example, to a child “the burner is hot – don't touch the stove or you will be hurt!” By giving that warning to the child you ensure that he won't touch the stove, even though he could. The warning helps to make sure that he won't.

Question: I was wondering if these people who lost their salvation or potentially could, do you lose your regeneration when you lose your salvation or do you not? That is a hard one, isn't it?

Answer: It is. It would seem like it. It would seem as though you die again spiritually. I think at one time Adam was not spiritually dead, right? But then he died through sin. In the same way, it would seem to me that a regenerate person who apostatizes casts the Holy Spirit out of his life and he dies spiritually and becomes in effect unregenerate again. Now, I think it is difficult to say with any sort of confidence what the answer to your question is. One is speculating here. But that would seem to make sense because that is why he's apostate. He is no longer regenerate; he is no longer reconciled to God. He is now lost in his sins and trespasses.

Question: How often can you do this? Is this a one time thing? Can I every week – I feel strongly both ways – this week I have fallen away from faith, then I come back, then I go

¹⁴¹ 24:54

back. Is it a one time thing or can I do it every week?

Answer: I think here Arminians would probably differ on this question. It seems to me that on the basis of what the passages in Hebrews say that this can only happen once. He says in chapter 6, verse 4, “For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened . . . if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.”

It seems to me that this is an irrevocable and perhaps therefore unpardonable sin. Remember I connected this with blasphemy of the Holy Spirit which Jesus said is an unpardonable sin. To outrage the Spirit of grace (as the author of Hebrews puts it) by casting Christ out of your life would be an unpardonable sin; there is no more sacrifice left. Now, I don’t think any of us knows when a person has really committed this irrevocable step, when he has crossed the line and can’t come back. I think we always have to assume that the person hasn’t crossed that line and do our best to bring him back. I say that on the basis of a passage like James 5:19-20,

My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and some one brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Here he imagines a believer that is wandering away from the truth and he seems to be on the slippery slope to destruction and he says, “If you bring him back you save his soul from death.” So we always need to pray for and strive to win back that person who apparently has apostatized and rejected Christ and pray that there is hope.¹⁴²

Let me, in our waning moments, share a few words of practical application of this. Then if we have further time for discussion we can but I don’t want to leave without sharing this.

I want to share some practical application of this lesson that I think will be applicable to all of us, whether you are Calvinist, Arminian, or just confused. *[laughter]*

1. *This is an exhortation to all of us to self-examination.* We need to examine ourselves to see if we are holding to the faith, if we are persevering and being true. Hebrews 3:12 says, “Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” We need to keep short accounts with God, to not let unconfessed sin accumulate in our lives, to check our hearts to see if it is growing unbelieving and cold toward God. Paul often will say “test yourself to see if you are holding to your faith.”

2. *This underlines the importance of meeting together for mutual encouragement.* In the third chapter of Hebrews, Hebrews 3:13, the author goes on to say, “But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Then in Hebrews 10:23-25, he says,

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and

¹⁴² 30:14

good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

I tremble, frankly, when I hear many young Christians say, “I don’t like church, therefore, I don’t attend church. I just sort of try to do it on my own.” That is a dangerous, dangerous path to trend. We need one another. Therefore he says don’t neglect to meet together as is the habit of some but all the more meet together, stir one another up, encourage one another, and help one another to make sure you are holding to the faith. I think a class like this is just a prime example of where we can do that to encourage and support one another in our Christian walk.

That is the practical application. No matter what you think, I think all of us would agree that we need to engage in self-examination to test our hearts periodically and then to mutually encourage one another. If you see someone wandering away from the truth or getting into something that would be destructive, taking that brother or sister aside and trying to help to bring them back and encourage them in their walk with God.

DISCUSSION

Question: In law school we learned that the difference between contract (where, if one party breaches, the other one is out of the deal) and covenant is that it can’t be renounced by one side. Covenant says if one party renounces the other one still is committed to doing what they agreed to do in the covenant. Jesus said, “I drink the new covenant with my blood.” So it always seemed to me that this is a covenant and not a contract we made with God – even if we let him down, he is fully committed to doing what he has promised to do with us.

Answer: I know nothing about the legality or the legal distinctions, but let me read you a passage from 2 Timothy that I think speaks to this.¹⁴³ Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:11 ff,

The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;
if we endure, we shall also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

Now there God, it seems, is faithful to his covenant. He will establish and sanctify and justify and glorify those who have faith in Christ. He holds his end of the bargain up. But he says if we deny him, he will also deny us. It is easy to overlook that but that is consistent with all of these other sorts of warnings that we’ve looked at. Do you have anything to add to the covenant/contract business or not?

Followup: I can say that there are dependent and independent covenants. An independent covenant is one you have a duty to perform regardless of the performance of the other parties to the agreement. A dependent covenant, if a party breaches it, then the other side

¹⁴³ 35:03

no longer has to perform because it is dependent on the performance of the other side. It is a little more complicated but that's my contribution.

Question: I have a question about the eternal afterlife. What exactly do you think allows us to persevere once we are with Christ? Is it simply the beatific vision? Just knowing my own sin nature, I have always been worried that I'll get to heaven and somehow I'll screw up. *[laughter]*

Answer: You are raising a profound question. Will there be freedom in heaven, and if so could you fall away in heaven? Here is my take on this, and this is admittedly speculative but I think it makes sense. I would say that in order for someone to rebel against God and reject God, God has to create that creature at a sort of arms distance so to speak. Otherwise, he would be so overpowered and overwhelmed by the beauty and attractiveness of God that rebellion would be impossible. So when God created the angels they seemed to have been created at a sort of epistemic arms distance that allowed for an angelic rebellion. But then that choice was sealed when God revealed to the elect angels his full glory and power so that now an angelic fall is no longer possible. I suspect that something like this might well be true for the blessed in heaven. When we go to heaven freed of all sin and its encumbrances, we will see Christ in his magnificence and glory and this will be a vision so beautify, so attractive, so irresistible that, in effect, freedom to sin will be removed. So I see this life as a sort of a veil of decision making during which time God is hidden in a way. We see evidence for God, he is present in his Holy Spirit and in his creation around us, but we see through a glass darkly (Paul says) but someday we will see face to face and then I think that choice will be sealed for eternity so that the elect will never fall away and never perish.

On that note we bring to a conclusion our study of perseverance.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Total Running Time: 39:27 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)