

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 28, Number 26

July 1, 2012



Salvation: Present and Future

Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:9–12, KJV 1900)

Scripture consistently distinguishes salvation as we presently experience God's deliverance—actually, deliverances—in our present world from our final or eternal deliverance. Whenever believers, however sincerely, confuse these two distinct deliverances, or salvations, the confusion leads to many other confusing errors. Bible doctrines are linked in one harmonious whole. Therefore, when someone twists a Scripture dealing with gospel salvation by interpreting it as referring to eternal salvation, or vice versa, inevitably the error spreads to other doctrines as well.

Our present study passage identifies a salvation that is linked to our faith and to fulfilled prophecy in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This salvation appears in the present tense. It is something that we presently realize and experience. It deals with a saving that is unique to New Testament believers. Old Testament believers were touched by the "Spirit of Christ," and thereby understood that a future age of believers in God would enjoy a salvation that they only knew in prophecy. We now receive that salvation, the "...end..." of our faith. This present salvation is complete in and of itself; notice that Peter uses the word "...end..." to make this point. The salvation of which Peter here writes does not anticipate a future completion. It is complete in the here and now. It has arrived at its logical and intended "end." In contrast, Paul identifies a distinct salvation that remains in the future.

*Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we **shall be saved** from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we **shall be saved** by his life. (Romans 5:9-10 KJVP; emphasis added)*

In the context of Romans 5, this future salvation is wholly reliant on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It involves our whole being, body, soul, and spirit. We are now justified. We are now reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

However, the full realization, the "End" of that work, remains yet future. "...we **shall be saved**..." from wrath by His life. Paul does not mention a single act, mental or physical, that we must complete for this future salvation to occur.

What is the danger of confusing these two distinct salvations or deliverances? The dangers are manifold. One specific danger that often appears is that the believer's active involvement in the present deliverance is errantly imposed onto the future, eternal deliverance, leading directly either to Arminian belief in salvation by works, or to the hybrid idea of salvation by grace, but it requires a human contribution of faith to the new birth process. In turn, this human contribution imposes a severe confinement onto the scope of God's election, for the belief that only those who believe the gospel are heirs of eternal salvation reduces the number of God's elect to a minuscule number of people, a categorical contradiction to John's description of their number. (Revelation 5:9; 7:9) When people's beliefs contradict Scripture, they manifest their error; Scripture remains true. "...let God be true...." (Romans 3:4)

An opposite error occasionally (actually rarely, though advocates of the error, like most egregious errors, are quite vocal in the promotion of their errant beliefs) appears that is directly related to this confusion. It begins with God's exclusive role in our eternal salvation and imposes the same exclusivity onto our present deliverance, thus rejecting any actual active personal participation of the believer in the present salvation of which Peter writes in our study passage.¹ It also rejects any real change of the child of God in the new birth. It logically rejects Peter's reasoning regarding "...the end of your faith..." and holds that God micromanages every emotion and act of the believer in the walk of faith. Advocates of this error despise any Biblical

¹ In researching some history on this fatalistic error a few years ago, I encountered a specific comment from an advocate of this error. He stated that we are fully as passive and God as active in our acts of faith and obedience as in our regeneration.

reference to the believer being vitally and wondrously changed in the new birth. It holds that we remain fully as depraved after a superficial, accomplish-nothing new birth as before, a reason they occasionally assign for their belief that God does everything in our acts of faith and obedience; supposedly, we do nothing actively in our faith walk because we remain as depraved and incapable of doing good as prior to our new birth. It also wholly rejects any active involvement of the born-again—and vitally changed—person's free will in acts of faith and obedience. Thus, advocates of this idea choose to effectively ignore or senselessly wrest (Twist out of joint) any Biblical reference to the regenerated person's will in obedience. Old Testament teachings include details for a "Freewill offering" to God. This term appears no less than ten times in Numbers-Deuteronomy. At its simplest reality, no such thing could exist if the regenerated child of God does not have a free—though vitally changed—will with which to make such an offering. An offering made by a Cosmic Puppeteer's orchestrating you on the end of his strings contradicts the whole concept of a "Free will offering." Biblical free will has no causative or instrumental role in our eternal salvation, including our new birth, God's preserving of us safely from falling away from that eternal state, or our final literal, bodily resurrection. Biblical free will is essential to our present faith walk and our godly faith—the "Now" (1 Peter 3:21) or present gospel salvation that Peter describes as the end result of our faith. New Testament teachings on discipleship consistently include the component of the regenerated believer's will in believing and obeying the gospel. Consider the following passages:

*For whosoever **will** save his life shall lose it: and whosoever **will** lose his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 16:25 KJVP; emphasis added)*

*For whosoever **will** save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. (Mark 8:35 KJVP; emphasis added)*

*For whosoever **will** save his life shall lose it: but whosoever **will** lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. (Luke 9:24 KJVP; emphasis added)*

*Whosoever shall **seek to** save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. (Luke 17:33 KJVP; emphasis added)*

These verses say nothing, not a word, about God puppeteer-like manipulating our obedient actions, and they clearly emphasize an action of the believer's will that Jesus says is a necessary part of Biblical discipleship. "...shall seek to..." in Luke 17:33 hardly describes a divinely micromanaged action. Based on the simple language of these

verses, the believer's will is no less active in one as in the other choices that appear in these passages. The fatalistic "I'm responsible for my sin, but God wholly caused my obedience" finds no support in these verses—or any other verse in the Bible. If God wholly caused your obedience, you'd have no need to study Scripture, hear the gospel, or make personal choices that impact your moral and spiritual conduct. God would merely pull the puppet strings, whether you did any of these things or not.

This form of fatalism also faces an insurmountable logical flaw in its failure to explain why all children of God do not believe and obey perfectly. If God is wholly responsible for our acts of faith and obedience, why does He not orchestrate perfect obedience in all of His elect? And, if He knows that, short of this puppeteer-like orchestration, every elect surely sins—and can't do otherwise—His refusal to puppeteer their obedience makes Him morally culpable for their sin by His failure to prevent what He knows must occur if He does not so act on them. Advocates of this error typically try to explain this failure by saying that God "Permits" sin to set the stage for Him to gain greater glory in redemption. Paul confronts the fatalistic notion that God needs our sin to gain more glory in Romans 3:1-8 and concludes that such a claim is slanderous to his godly faith—and to his moral Judge and God. If God is so involved in our sins, Paul asserts that He is thereby culpable in the sin and therefore cannot righteously judge anyone as a sinner, since His own calculated and therefore intentional negligence either directly or indirectly caused their sin. According to Paul's inspired language, if God so acts, He should face trial with the sinner, not act as righteous Judge of sinners. The idea reduces the righteous Judge and God of the Bible to a duplicitous deity no different from the many mythical fatalistic pagan gods of human history, including some who appear in Scripture. And typically a significant number of the very few advocates of this error slip the last final step into full fatalism, just as we read in Scripture.

*Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, **We are delivered to do all these abominations?** (Jeremiah 7:9-10 KJVP; emphasis added)*

² When God confronted Adam and Eve for their sin, they both tried to shift the responsibility for the sin from themselves to God. Advocates of these fatalistic ideas eventually tend to imitate Adam and Eve by either directly or indirectly blaming God for their sin. If God orchestrates every act of our faith and obedience, His failure to fully do so and thus to prevent our sin makes Him indirectly the cause—by intentional negligence—of our sin. James 1:13-15 rejects the idea that God, either directly or

The fatalistic error that rejects God's changing a person's will and nature in regeneration and the role of the believer's will in our present walk of faith effectively falls into an old heresy that appeared—and soon collapsed of its own errant weight—in Texas in the early twentieth century, usually known as “Hollow-log” doctrine. This doctrine rejects any change in the individual who experiences the new birth. It teaches that the regenerated person is wholly as depraved after the new birth as before. He/she is fully as incapable of any act of faith or obedience as before the new birth. It holds that every act of faith and obedience is the result of God's puppeteer-like manipulation of the person. The “Hollow-log” term grew out of an illustration that advocates of this error supposedly used in which they likened the role of the Holy Spirit in a regenerated person to a rabbit temporarily entering a hollow log and later leaving. It thus also rejects the Biblical teaching on the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every regenerated elect person. The log remains unchanged by the rabbit's temporary presence. Effectively then, this error rejects that the new birth makes any change whatever in the individual, an idea that Scripture wholly rejects and contradicts.

Several years ago, I had a sadly interesting conversation with a man who grew up in North Carolina. Some of his relatives belonged to the small number of remaining fatalistic folks who hold to this error. His experience with these people led him to conclude that Primitive Baptists wholly reject the Bible doctrine of the new birth; these people effectively did, but he didn't realize that they represented a rare heresy long ago rejected by sound Primitive Baptists. Since those holding to that error went their way, they have consistently diminished in number. How could they do otherwise, when they believe that they are responsible for nothing, and that God puppeteers their every act of faith and obedience? By doing nothing that Scripture commands the born-again individual to do and waiting for God to do what He repeatedly commands His people willingly to do, they rather dramatically diminished in number. At one time the State of New York had a significant number of Primitive Baptist churches, but this fatalistic error invaded those churches, and they died, so that today there are no churches of our fellowship in the whole state. For obvious reasons, this fatalistic doctrine is a powerful church killer.

Likewise, these doctrines destroy Biblical evangelism. The man with whom I had this conversation holds to many beliefs quite similar to mine. Who knows? Perhaps, had he been

indirectly, in any way is responsible for our sin and rightly attributes the cause of sin to the sinner, not to a calculating duplicitous deity who indirectly neglects prevention of sin for his own sinister purposes.

exposed early to sound doctrine instead of this fatalistic philosophy that rejects the Biblical doctrine of the new birth, he might have well been a sound minister within our fellowship. Most Bible readers who respect the teachings of Scripture, use a small amount of common sense, and respect the Scriptures and the morality of God, would immediately dismiss anyone who advocates these doctrines. They further erode the faith by their influence on naïve and trusting sheep who listen to their words more than to Scripture.

The man's exposure to this heresy caused him to form a wholly errant and disgraceful assessment of what Primitive Baptists believe. Peter writes of this very thing.

And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. (2 Peter 2:2 KJVP)

By the end of our conversation, he knew that at least one Primitive Baptist strongly believes in the Bible doctrine of a real and vital new birth that does indeed change the individual profoundly, morally and spiritually. At times it is necessary for preachers to deal with errors that wolves in sheep's clothes teach the unsuspecting and ignorant sheep of God for the very reason that Peter identifies. Error parading in the name of truth brings disgrace and evil speaking against Biblical truth. Those who believe Biblical truth must do as Paul, Peter, and John did; refute the error and affirm God's truth.

Some people who study these errors have calculated that significantly less than five percent of people who in any way loosely identify themselves as Primitive Baptists hold to these errors, but one child of God in such abysmal error is one too many. And one person in another fellowship who happens to encounter one of these people and thereby form a wrong assessment of our faith is one too many. It is therefore incumbent on those who believe Biblical truth to teach it loudly and clearly—and on occasion to expose and to refute the array of errors that grow out of these unbiblical and pagan-like fatalistic philosophies. Is such exposure and refutation Biblical? Indeed it is. How many times do we read in Paul's writings about those who taught contrary to His right teaching? Almost every one of Paul's church letters deals with this objective, to expose and to refute an error that had invaded and threatened the sound faith of a given local church or, in the case of Galatians, a group of churches in a region. Was Paul emphatic in his confrontation and rejection of error? Indeed he was. (Acts 15:2; Romans 3:8) We should do likewise.

In our next study, we shall examine the beauties of the “...end...” of our faith in this present gospel salvation.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor