

# **What Difference Does It Make?**

## **A Discussion of the Evangelical Unity of the Doctrines of Grace.**

**by Mark Webb**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This booklet contains a series of articles concerning the utility—that is, the usefulness—of the doctrines of grace. These doctrines, especially in the area of evangelism, come under attack, not only for being less than useful, but for being downright counterproductive. Quite often we hear the position espoused that such things, if they ought to be taught at all, should be reserved for those already converted. They are treated as intellectual niceties which have little, if any, practical value in winning the lost to Christ. It's the aim of this booklet to show that the very opposite is true. Not only are these truths useful in evangelizing the lost, they are the precise antidote to the poisonous errors that grip most of evangelical Christianity in our day.

Let me say from the outset that it's not the "usefulness" of any truth that qualifies that truth for publication or dissemination. The "whole counsel of God" is to be taught and proclaimed for no other reason than that it is the "whole counsel of God". If proclaiming what is true about God and His relationship with man drives everyone away, we ought still to proclaim it, letting God be true and every man a liar! While it's true that some in their zeal for these doctrines have erred in the opposite direction—teaching nothing but the sovereignty of God's grace to the exclusion of proclaiming human responsibility—any thinking man will immediately recognize that this is not the major problem confronting the evangelical community in our day. We face an entire generation who have cut their teeth on the idea that they can be saved any time, any place, and, almost, in any way that they please. It is this haughty, prideful spirit of our day which this booklet seeks to address.

This author's hope is that the reader would read with a "teachable spirit" and Bible in hand. The scriptures are our final authority, not only for our doctrinal beliefs, but also for our evangelism and the tools we utilize in that evangelism.

## Dead Or Alive?

### *The Evangelical Utility of the Doctrine of Total Inability*

Consider for a moment the utility of the doctrine of "Total Inability". This doctrine states, in a nutshell, that every faculty of man's being has been pervaded by sin in the fall of Adam. The whole man—his mind, his heart, and, especially, his will—has been so affected by the fall that he is in a state of utter and complete inability to comply with God's commandments. His problem is far deeper than that he simply "will not". For he's neither spiritually injured, nor spiritually sick, but in a state of spiritual "death", resulting in a condition which can only be described by the word "cannot"! Does he have "free will"? Well, if you mean by that, is he free to choose what a man who is dead in trespasses and sins will choose, of course! It is the nature of the tree, says Jesus, that determines the nature of the fruit (Matt. 7:17-18). In like manner, the fallen nature of the sinner will determine the nature of his choices. Therefore, though the scripture declares that a lost man **MUST** be born again, it just as clearly declares that such a "new birth" occurs by the free will of God, not the free will of man (John 1:13). Though it declares that men **MUST** come to Christ to be saved, it just as clearly declares that men cannot come unless God effectually draws them (John 6:44-45). Though it declares that men **MUST** believe on Christ to be saved, it just as clearly declares that the faith that saves the soul is a gift of God's grace (Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29). Though it declares men **MUST** receive the things of the Spirit of God to be saved, it just as clearly declares that such things cannot be received by lost men (I Cor. 2:14).

Let me illustrate. Several years ago a young man, complaining of this doctrine, declared to me, "I think salvation works like this: Lost men are in a condition like a sick man in a bed dying of pneumonia. Christ is like the antibiotic which God has placed on the night stand next to him. The message of the Gospel is that if only he will reach out to the nightstand and take the medicine, he'll be saved!" I replied like this: "I agree with your illustration, as far as it goes. Certainly Christ is 'medicine', if you will, the remedy for man's need. God has set Him before men, and has commanded all men to lay hold of Him. But here your illustration breaks down. If I have pneumonia, my body may be attacked by the sickness, but my will to choose or reject treatment remains untouched. But in the case of a lost sinner, it's especially his will that's sick! He refuses to take the medicine for the simple fact that he loves his sickness and despises the remedy. In fact, he'd rather DIE as take the medicine! So you might as well have a dead man lying in that bed."

Now where does that leave a man?

Our opponents say, in despair, with no hope". If you mean that it leaves men despairing of any hope in THEMSELVES, then I most wholeheartedly concur. In fact, that's precisely where a man MUST be brought if ever he would be saved. He must despair of his own goodness, his own ability, his own righteousness, and cast himself wholly and solely upon the mercy of God in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. His cry must be that of Toplady's: *"Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling"*.

It is rare today to find a man in such a condition. The vast majority of our generation have cut their teeth on a teaching that tells them that God has done all that He can do to save them, and now it's all up to them to "accept" (terminology used nowhere in scripture) His offer. Notice who this leaves in the driver's seat! It's no wonder that we labor among a people who think they can be saved if, when, and how they please—and are quite indignant when you tell them that the case is quite otherwise. Rather than bringing them to despair of self, this teaching specifically points them TO themselves as the critical contributor to their salvation! Jesus, they are told, is like the beggar knocking outside their hearts' door. He is pleading with them to "let" Him save them (notice who's in charge of the situation). Rather than stripping the man of every possible ground of boasting, this system leaves man with at least one act of which he may justly be proud and boastful—his vaunted "choice" which "allowed" the work of Christ to be effectual and the will of God not to be frustrated.

The true Gospel of Christ has a far different effect. It produces "knocking" and "pleading", but, in this case, it's the sinner who is doing it! Notice how Paul introduces Jesus Christ to the Athenian philosophers on Mars' Hill in Acts 17. Analyze his sermon carefully. These men have never heard of Jesus Christ. How does he introduce them to Him? Notice that the very first glimpse he gives these pagans of the Savior is not as a beggar at their back door, but as the One Who holds their destiny in His Hands! The question, sinner, is not what you'll do with Jesus, but what He'll do with YOU! Left to yourself, you'll bar the door of your heart to the King of Glory. Were it not for His power to open the barred hearts of men (Acts 16:14), no man would be saved.

Does this lead to passivity or fatalism? Why should it? Suppose I have a deadly disease. Left to myself, I'll surely die. Yet I've heard of a great physician who is able to treat and cure cases like mine. Do I despair? Of myself, yes! But what's to prevent me from going and camping out at that doctor's doorstep, pleading with him to take my case? "But", says someone, "this treatment is incredibly expensive, and you don't have a red cent to your name!" What's to keep me from begging him to take me on as a charity case? Nothing! Nothing, that is, except my proud heart. Ah, there's the rub! Now we've hit upon the real issue! God offers salvation freely to hell-deserving sinners like you—but you'll have to come down off your "high-horse" to receive it.

At the conclusion of a parable in which a Publican is justified by casting himself on God's mercy, and a proud Pharisee is rejected, Christ says, "EVERYONE that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14, My emphasis). That is just as much a universal declaration as John 3:16, is it not? Does one of those verses apply, but not the other? No, the matter is quite clear: Salvation will only be found by men who've drunk deeply from the cup of humility. Sinner, if God leaves you a leg to stand on, you'll try to stand on it! If He leaves you any other hope but Christ, you'll trust it rather than Him! If He leaves you any other hiding place but in the Savior, you'll flee to it and ignore Him! If He leaves you any other ground on which to stand than upon Christ, you'll bank your soul upon that sinking sand rather than upon the Solid Rock! It may be humbling to utterly turn your back on self, but it's absolutely essential. For God has placed a Rock in Zion, and either you will fall upon that Rock, and be broken, or that Rock will fall upon you and grind you to powder! There is no middle ground!

The axe must be laid to the root of your sinful pride if ever you'll be saved, and I know of no other truth that God more often employs in that process than the doctrine of Total Inability. It declares that there's no soundness in you from the crown of your head to the sole of your feet. It trumpets out that your very righteousness—your best works—are as filthy rags in God's sight. Bow down, sinner, to the testimony of God Almighty, and cry for mercy!

This truth is a most humiliating truth—especially to a generation steeped in this modern-day atmosphere of self-love, self-confidence, and self-glorification. But then, as painful as it is, no one ever died of humiliation. No one ever perished of brokenness. In fact, it's the first step down the road that leads to life.

## Why Me?

### *The Evangelical Utility of the Doctrine of Unconditional Election*

Election! It's one word almost certain to stir up a ruckus in our day. Its very introduction into a religious conversation will be met with either open-mouth ignorance, unbelievable hysteria, or downright hostility! Obviously, this doctrine hits a sore spot. From the reaction it generates, one might be tempted to think that the only fruit this teaching produces is pride in its adherents, anger in its detractors, and general conflict among the saints. However, that's not the case at all. Not only is it an antidote for many of the poisonous errors of our day, it also produces, when rightly apprehended, the very fruits so sadly missing in contemporary evangelical circles.

### **Election Ensures the Concept of Salvation by Grace**

The most casual Bible student admits that scripture indeed employs the language of election when speaking of God's eternal purposes. Yet most seek to dodge the implications of that language by fleeing to the refuge of "conditional" election (i.e. that God's choice, or election, of certain men to salvation is "conditioned" by his foreseeing faith in those men). I'll leave the task of showing that this "time tunnel" hypothesis will not fly to the many excellent works on the subject. Better yet, see it yourself by getting out your Bible and thoroughly studying the many references of scripture concerning this subject. I intend to deal not so much with the proof of the doctrine as with its ramifications.

If "conditional" election is true—if God's choice of me is determined by my choice of Him—the practical effect of this teaching is no different than if there were no election at all! The proof of this assertion is seen in the fact that the groups who hold this view seldom, if ever, mention the subject. And why should they? To what purpose? Since it's taught that God has done all He can do to save, and now it's up to man, the will of man becomes the determining and dominant factor in salvation. Whenever you make God's choice of men to salvation hinge upon what He foresees in man—be it his work, his faith, or his choice—you have effectively undermined the whole concept of salvation by grace alone! Either salvation depends upon God's free choice and good pleasure, which is the principle of "grace", or it depends upon something man himself produces, which is the principle of "works". It really matters not whether this "thing" which God foresees is something tangible, seen outwardly in the man's life, or something intangible, seen inwardly only by God. It matters not whether it's a huge thing, or whether it's a tiny thing. So long as man's part is the critical, determinative part, you have a system based upon "works" not grace .

Let me illustrate. Suppose you came to me and said, "Mark, I have a \$15,000 car here. If you'll pay me \$15,000, I'll give you the car." We'd all agree, that's not "grace", that's "works". But suppose you said, "Mark, I've a \$15,000 car here, and I'll simply give you the car." We'd all agree, that's "grace", not "works". But now let's try to mix the two concepts. Suppose you said, "Mark, here's a \$15,000 car. I'll be \$14,999 gracious to you if you'll simply pay me \$1." Have we succeeded in mixing "grace" and "works"? No! For what's the practical difference between that last offer and you simply saying, "Mark, here's a \$15,000 car—I'll sell it for \$1"? Do you see? You're still coming to me on the basis of "selling", not "giving". You've not changed your principle, you've simply lowered your price! This is precisely Paul's point in Romans 11:5-6. An "unconditional" election is the only concept of election consistent with salvation by free grace!

### **Election Excludes Man's Boasting**

Scripture tells us in passages like Rom. 3:27, I Cor. 1:26-31, and Eph. 2:8-10, that God intentionally designed salvation so that no man could boast of it. He didn't merely arrange it so that boasting would be discouraged or kept to a minimum—He planned it so that boasting would be absolutely excluded! Election does precisely that.

At this point I need to make several things clear. First, election in no way limits the free offer of the Gospel. There are many promises in scripture extended promiscuously to all men. We are commanded to preach the Gospel to every creature, conveying to all men everywhere the gracious invitation therein. Election was never intended to tell us who MAY come to Christ—Whosoever will MAY come! Rather, election tells us who WILL come to Christ. It answers the question, "Why me?"

Secondly, election is unto salvation, but is not salvation. Those chosen to salvation in Christ before the foundation of the world enter this life "children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3). The elect must "obtain" this life in Christ (II Tim. 2:10), and they obtain it by meeting certain conditions. ELECTION IS UNCONDITIONAL, BUT SALVATION IS NOT! Men must repent of sin and believe on Christ if ever they are saved. Yes, God offers salvation as a gift, BUT I must take it through repentance and faith. Election in no way does away with that necessity. Yet election makes clear that should I repent and believe, I'll do so as a result of God's gracious work in me, and not because I have produced such things of myself (Phil. 2:12-13; II Thess. 2:13-14). While admitting that I cannot boast in the PRODUCTION of the gift of salvation, I might be tempted to boast in my RECEPTION of that gift. Election effectively removes this last possible ground of boasting. What I am, I am totally and completely by the grace of God alone!

Perhaps a personal anecdote would be helpful here ...

A few years ago, while pastoring in Nashville, a member of my church there had a co-worker who belonged to a large Southern Baptist Church in the area. This man invited the member and myself over to share our beliefs to a Sunday evening Bible class that he was teaching. It seems this class had been studying various cults, and this man, upon learning of our beliefs, obviously felt that we qualified for his "Cult of the Week" class! I began the session by explaining that the truths we held were hardly "cultish", and were, in fact, the very truths which Southern Baptists themselves held in their early days. After giving a brief survey of the doctrines of grace, I asked for questions. One lady, in particular, was troubled. She said, "This is the most awful thing I've ever heard! You make it sound as if God is intentionally turning away men who would be saved, receiving only the elect!" I answered her in this vein: "You misunderstand the situation. You're visualizing that God is standing at the door of Heaven, and men are thronging to get in that door. And God says to various ones, 'Yes, you may come, but not you, or you, or you—yes, you may come, and you, and you, but not you, etc.' The situation is hardly this! Rather, God stands at the door of Heaven with His arms outstretched, inviting all to come. Yet all men without exception are running in the opposite direction towards Hell as hard as they can go. So God, in election, graciously reaches out and stops this one, and that one, and this one over here, and that one over there, and effectually draws them to Himself by changing their hearts, making them willing to come. Election keeps no one out of Heaven who would otherwise have been there, but it keeps a whole multitude of folks out of Hell who would otherwise have been there! Were it not for election, Heaven would be an empty place, and Hell would be bursting at the seams!" That does put a different complexion on the thing, doesn't it?

If you perish in Hell, blame yourself, as it's entirely your fault. But should you make Heaven, blame God, for it's entirely His fault! To Him alone belongs all the praise and glory!

### **Election Guarantees the Success of the Gospel Ministry**

A final product of this doctrine is a confidence in the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation. Consider Acts 18:1-11. Paul came to Corinth preaching the Gospel without much apparent success, and was preparing to move on it seems. Yet Christ came to him one night in a vision, telling him to remain there and preach, "for I have much people in this city". Where were they? Paul couldn't see them. Yet Christ knew His own, and would bring them to salvation through the preaching of Paul. Surely this should sound a note of encouragement to the many of us who seemingly labor on and on with so little fruit to show for it. It tells us that we do not need to soft-petal the demands of Christ in order to gain Him disciples. It tells us that we don't need to rely on psychological gimmickry and persuasive techniques to wrangle "decisions" out of men.

It tells us that we need not worry that had we sung just one more verse of "*Just As I Am*", or had we said things in a slightly different way, or employed a better illustration, someone might have responded. It tells us simply to keep our noses to the grindstone and preach the Gospel just as clearly and accurately as we can, letting the chips fall where they may. For it is this proclamation God will certainly use in bringing His elect to salvation.

## **Power in the Blood?**

### *The Evangelical Utility of the Doctrine of Particular Redemption*

For whom did Christ die? It is simply assumed by the great mass of evangelical Christianity that He died for everyone. And I mean, EVERYONE: For every child of Adam who ever has or ever will live; for both the believer and the infidel; for the man who goes to Heaven, as well as for the man who goes to Hell! In fact, most of the so-called "plans" of salvation employed in our day confront the sinner with the "fact" that Christ has died for him. "Now", he is told, "it is up to YOU to receive the benefits of what Christ has done." How could anyone presume to question a "doctrine" which is so "obviously" taught in scripture, so vital to the faith of believers, and so central to the "plan" of salvation? Well, to be blunt, because NOTHING could be further from what is taught in scripture, or as destructive to saving faith, or as misleading to a lost sinner!

## **Limited Atonement**

The atonement of Christ must be considered as to both its scope and its power. Unless you believe in "universalism"—the unscriptural notion that everyone will go to Heaven—you must limit the atonement in one way or another. You must either limit it in regards to its SCOPE (for whom it was offered) or in regards to its POWER (what it accomplished). You simply cannot have it both ways! The reason I believe in "limited" atonement is because I do not believe in a "limited" atonement! That is, I believe that the atonement was limited in its scope to the elect, but is unlimited in its power to save. To prove this assertion from scripture is beyond the scope of this article. Again, I refer you to the numerous works on the subject. But for now, get out your Bible and note that the scriptures declare that Christ died for His "sheep" (John 10:15) and His "church" (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). Further, the scriptures present the atonement as efficacious, purging sin (Heb. 1:3), obtaining eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12), putting away the sin (Heb. 9:26), and perfecting forever (Heb. 10:14) all those for whom it was offered. If you are perplexed by passages like John 3:16 and the like, I refer you to John Owen's great work on the subject, "*The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*". However, I must limit myself to the utility, or usefulness, of this doctrine for the purposes of our discussion.



## **A Meaningful Atonement**

There's no better way I can think of to make the atonement of Christ absolutely meaningless than to teach that it was done for each and every man! Let me illustrate. Suppose I go to a man's wife and tell her "Oh, how your husband loves you! I've never seen anything quite like it! He's so thoughtful, caring, and considerate towards you. And do you know what the very best thing there is about your husband's love? He loves every other woman up and down the block just as much as he loves you!" Well, it all sounded pretty good until we got to the last part! The best way to make a husband's love meaningless is to extend it promiscuously to all women. It's the "particular" love that a husband has only for his wife that makes his love mean something. In the very same way, when the death of Christ is extended to include all men without exception, the atonement is robbed of its significance and meaning.

You may sing "*Power in the Blood*" with all your might, but if Christ's Blood was shed equally and promiscuously for both those who will be saved and those who will perish, it's clear that the "power" to save CANNOT lie in the Blood of Christ! Obviously the "power" must lie somewhere else—namely, in the will of man! But if, on the other hand, Christ's dying for a man is an act that secures the salvation of that man, then we are correct in singing, not only "*Power in the Blood*", but also:

*Dear dying Lamb,  
Thy precious Blood,  
Shall never lose it's pow' r;  
'Til all the ransomed Church of God  
Be saved to sin no more!*

The death of Christ, when seen in this light, becomes far more than a mere "attempt" or "gambit" on God's part to save each and every man. Rather, Christ's death becomes the centerpiece in a Divine plan of redemption that actually accomplishes its purpose. Therefore, instead of utilizing the name "limited" atonement to refer to this redemption, I prefer the name "definite" or "real" atonement. The main difference between the doctrine that Christ died for sheep and goats alike, and the teaching that He died for His sheep only, is not so much in the number for whom Christ died, but in the nature of the atonement itself.

## **Blood You Can Trust**

Nothing is quite so destructive of saving faith as the teaching that Christ died for everyone! True, saving faith, is a faith that turns its back on all other hopes and rests itself solely and wholly on Christ and His work at the cross. If Christ did precisely the same thing for both the man going to Heaven and the man going to Hell, how, pray tell, can a sinner trust himself to the work of Christ alone? Let me illustrate. Consider Paul's question in I Cor. 4:7 —"Who maketh thee to differ from another?" Here's a man going to Hell, and here's a man going to Heaven. WHO makes the difference? Be careful how you answer, for your answer will reveal who it is you believe your "savior" to be! Most people believe that in spite of all Christ did, He did not make the difference between Heaven and Hell—their "free will" did. And that's precisely the problem—they believe they saved themselves! Yes, they did it with God's help, and no, they couldn't have done it without what Christ did, but, in the final analysis, THEY made the difference. But let me ask another question: WHAT makes the difference? Here is a man going to Heaven, and here is one going to Hell—if Christ did precisely the same thing for both, it's clear that what HE did was not that which made the difference! Now be careful how you answer. Your answer to this question will tell us what you are trusting in for your salvation! How can a man trust the salvation of his soul to that which he can see did not make the difference? Whatever he perceives as making the difference is what he MUST trust! And that is precisely why we have men today trusting their decisions, trusting their aisle-walking, trusting their prayers, trusting just about everything imaginable BUT the Blood of Christ alone! But a faith that sees the death of Christ as a SAVING thing, will abandon all other hopes and cleave to Christ's Blood alone. A man with such faith can truly sing:

*Nothing in my hands! bring,  
Simply to Thy cross! cling.*

All men admit that there is a great obstacle in the path of a sinner going to Heaven—that's why, all agree, Christ came into this world and died at Calvary. But the question is this: Did His death remove EVERY obstacle, or did it simply remove SOME obstacles, leaving it to us to remove the rest? If it's the latter, we're still operating on the basis of man's works and merit. Christ, in this case, came so that God could put salvation "on sale", making it affordable. But if it's the former, then God indeed justifies men FREELY, for the sake of Christ's Blood alone.

## What Do We Tell a Sinner?

As mentioned earlier, the modern "plan" of salvation always assures a sinner that Christ has died for him, and pleads with him to "accept" what Jesus did. In fact, many can't even conceive of how they would go about the work of evangelism if they could not make that assertion. Yet no one in all the Bible ever preached to lost sinners that Christ died for them! Neither does scripture say that what Christ did at the cross is offered to men! Rather Christ offered Himself "up" in sacrifice (Heb. 7:27), i.e. to God His Father. Most will admit the very basic fact that Christ took upon Himself all the sins of those for whom He died (whatever their number might be), and that He died to render a full and complete satisfaction to the broken Law of God. Well, if God was satisfied in the death of His Son (and the Resurrection is the proof that He was), how then can He justly put any man in Hell for whom Christ has rendered a full and complete satisfaction? If Christ at the cross has paid in full for each and every sin of each and every man, then for what sin will God put ANY man in Hell? Is God so just that, on the one hand, He demands that the price of sin be paid, but on the other hand, so unjust, that He demands payment TWICE—once from His Son at the cross, and then again from the sinner in Hell? I know someone will say, "But we must receive what Christ has done!" You miss the point. Atonement is secured NOT when Jesus or His work is acceptable to YOU, but when YOU are made acceptable to God "in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6)!

What then do we tell a lost sinner? To where do we point them? To the risen and enthroned Savior! Yes, from God's point of view, there is a "plan" of salvation: He does everything according to a purpose and a scheme. But from man's point of view, there is no "plan" of salvation by which he completes certain steps and is saved. Rather, there's a "man" of salvation, the God-Man, Jesus Christ, seated at the Right Hand of God His Father with all power in Heaven and earth in His Hands! The question to be asked by the sinner seeking salvation is not whether Christ died for him. The question is this: Does that man seated on that Throne have the Power to save a sinner like me? To that question, the scriptures leave no doubt: He is ABLE to save to the UTTERMOST those who come unto God by Him (Heb. 7:25). There is infinite merit in the work of Christ at Calvary, enough to save a million worlds of men. The question is the intent in the atonement—for WHOM was it accomplished? The scriptures plainly answer that question: It was done for all those who would COME to Christ in faith. Who are they? The very ones that God gave to His Son to save—the ones He chose in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-6; II Thess. 2:13-14; II Tim. 1:9-10)!

## Who Can Come?

### *The Evangelical Utility of the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace*

What is it, exactly, that saves the soul of a man? You might think that I would reply that it is God's election, or choice, of that man. Yet that's simply not true. God in His election makes choice of men TO salvation, and that choice will not be thwarted; but "election to salvation" and "salvation" are not the same things. Other wise men would be saved at the moment God makes choice of them, before the foundation of the world. Yet it's clear from scripture that the elect enter this world "children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3), needing to be saved.

Others might say that it's the death of Christ in a man's stead which saves his soul. To be sure, without His death, no one would be saved. Yet Christ's death for His people, which secures, purchases, and guarantees their salvation, does not immediately bring salvation upon His people. Else all those for whom He died would be saved at the moment His work on Calvary was finished 2,000 years ago. Yes, He bought their salvation—but He bought it, and it's His! The merit, the value, and the efficacy of what He did was not distributed immediately upon His death, but resides in His Person.

### **Life in Christ**

The life Christ obtained for His people is never bestowed apart from Himself. A man will obtain life only when he comes into a living union with Him Who is Life indeed. Whoever a man may be—elect or not—outside of Christ, he is outside of life (I John 5:12), and the wrath of God abides upon him (John 3:36). How, then, does a sinner receive this life in Christ?

Election, as we've seen, is unconditional—but salvation is not! There are conditions which must be met if a man ever comes to salvation: He must come to life in Christ through repentance and faith. According to II Thess. 2:13, God not only has chosen men to an "end" — "salvation" — but He has also chosen the means to that "end" — "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth". Does it not follow then, that if God has unconditionally chosen some to salvation, and has also ordained that salvation be obtained only through repentance and faith, that God must do something to insure that those so chosen actually repent and believe? Perhaps such would not be necessary if elect men were falling all over themselves in a mad scramble to lay hold of life in Christ. But such is emphatically not the case!

The elect of God by nature are in a state of utter inability and rebellion towards God. Their salvation has been **ORDAINED** by God the Father from before the foundation of the world. Their salvation has been **SECURED** and **PURCHASED** by God the Son on Calvary's cross. But for their salvation to be actually **OBTAINED** and **REALIZED**, a work of God the Holy Spirit must ensue that "irresistibly" brings them to repentance and faith in Christ. Of what use is this doctrine? It reminds us, first of all, where life is found—not in a work of man, neither in believing a doctrine, nor even in an eternal decree, but in the Lord of Life! Consider II Tim. 2:10: "Therefore, I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Paul is suffering the things he suffers because he knows that the elect, though chosen **TO** salvation from the foundation of the world, must **OBTAIN** that salvation which resides in Christ Jesus.

### **No Man Can**

It's clear from scripture that all men are promised eternal life should they truly believe in Christ (e.g. John 3:16). All men **MAY** come in faith to Christ—they have permission—but who **WILL** come? Because all men share the same contempt for God and His Son, no man, on his own, will come to Christ. Read John 6:44-45 very carefully. It is stated that none "can" come to Christ except they be "drawn". Many people believe that to some extent. They believe that apart from the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, no one will come to Christ. But they also believe that this "conviction" may well be resisted and thwarted by man's stubborn will and rebellious nature. That's **NOT** what this passage is saying! The word is "draw", not "woo". Go to a well and see if you can "woo" a bucket of water to the top! This is plainly speaking of something which effectually brings a sinner in faith to Christ. To say that it's "irresistible" does not mean that the sinner does not resist this working. It simply means that the Spirit of God overcomes and conquers the resistance met in the heart of the sinner.

What is the nature of this "drawing"? Perhaps you have the mental picture of the Hand of God laying hold of a lost sinner and dragging him, kicking and screaming, into the Kingdom of Christ against his will. Get rid of that silly notion once and for all! The next verse makes clear that they are drawn by being "taught". God supernaturally opens the sinner's blind eyes to see his great need of the Savior. Such a man is made willing, and freely chooses to come to Christ. In fact, he's made desperate for Christ and storms the gates of the Kingdom! This is not an "attempt" on God's part, or God "trying" to talk man into something which he may or may not accept—for the passage states that "every" one of those so taught of God comes to Christ.

Why teach this doctrine? It reminds us once again that ALL of salvation is of grace. Knowing that those saved must believe and repent, I might be tempted to think that those things are my contribution to the work of salvation. But this doctrine makes it clear and plain: Yes, the sinner must meet certain conditions to be saved, but he will do so only as he is "given" the grace to do so (Cp. John 6:65).

### **God Must Work**

Perhaps the most needed lesson we are taught by this doctrine is that there is something that goes on in salvation which only God can do. Because the things which men do in coming to salvation (e.g. repenting, believing, coming to Christ) are things which we can see with our physical eyes, and the working of the Holy Spirit in a man's heart is something we cannot see, the tendency is always present to confuse the cause for the effect and the effect for the cause. Consider the Prodigal Son: He changed his mind about his father and his sin; he made a decision to go home; he actually arose and came home pleading mercy; and he actually found mercy from his father. We might be tempted to see these actions on the part of the son as the cause and reason of the mercy he receives. But his father was not confused about cause and effect. For he declares, "this, my son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is FOUND" (Luke 15:24, My emphasis). We didn't SEE anyone FIND him, as with the shepherd who sought and found his sheep, or the woman who swept her house until she found her coin. But just because we didn't SEE it, doesn't mean that it didn't occur! The Holy Spirit's work is indeed like the wind—we see it and know it, not directly, but by its effects.

One result of this confusion about cause and effect has been to imply that salvation can be obtained by "imitating" the experience of others—i.e. Do what they did, kneel where they knelt, and pray what they prayed, and you'll be saved, too! Today we have thousands walking aisles, kneeling at "prayer altars", and parroting the sinner's prayer." They are told that because they've done these things they're saved and never to doubt it. Yet scripture declares you MUST be born again to ever see or enter the Kingdom of Heaven! Nothing in the universe "births" itself of its own will. Neither is the "New Birth" of a sinner the production of man's will, but the result of the will and power of God (Cp. John 1:12-13; James 1:18). Faith and repentance are not the causes of this new creation, but the consequences of it! They are the inevitable responses of a man who's been raised from spiritual death to spiritual life.

The bottom line of the matter is this: In salvation, there's simply no substitute for God! He must work, He must draw, He must change, He must empower! With men these things are impossible. Yet with God, all things are possible!

## Who Will Endure?

### *The Evangelical Utility of the Doctrine of the Preservation of the Saints*

"He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" declares our Lord in Matt. 24:13. Though some pull the teeth of this verse by casting it in a particular eschatological setting, the fact remains that what is here declared by our Lord is the consistent testimony of Scripture. For in Heb. 3:6 we read that we belong to Christ's household "IF we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Later, in verse 14, we find "For we are made partakers of Christ, IF we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (My emphasis).

Christian history provides ample testimony to the fact that every age has had its share of those who once gave a seemingly valid profession of faith in Christ only to later fall away from that profession. In the scriptural record, we have the notable cases of Judas among the Twelve, Simon Magus among the Samaritan converts, and Demas among those who accompanied Paul. But in our day and culture this phenomenon has reached epidemic proportions. It's not uncommon to find that the vast majority of those "saved" in a modern evangelistic campaign will show no evidence whatsoever of a Christian walk within a year of their "salvation". Such results have become the rule rather than the exception! How do we explain this phenomenon on such a wide scale and to such an unprecedented degree? How are we to view such "converts"?

### **The Carnal Christian**

An answer is readily supplied by adherents to the "Carnal Christian Theory". They claim these are actually Christians—howbeit "camal" Christians. In this two-tiered approach to Soteriology, the claim is made that many converts remain in a lower, immature state, hardly differing in any respect from the lost, except that they've "invited" Jesus into their lives. Thus they may live out their days showing no evidence whatsoever of spiritual life, yet die and go to heaven on the basis of their prior "decision". In all fairness, the proponents of this theory do exhort men on to the higher level of the Christian life—i.e. becoming "spiritual" Christians. Yet, as one friend put it, you couldn't build a better bombshelter for camality if you tried! False assurance is engendered by the notion that fruitfulness and obedience are strictly optional. Further, this theory allows the evangelistic method employed to bear no responsibility at all for the quality of its converts! Should every single one of its converts be devoid of any sign of spiritual life, one must not dare question it. After all, it did its job. It persuaded men to "accept" Christ. The problem is one of growth, not life, we are told.

## **The Arminian Answer**

Another explanation is given by classical Arminianism. This view simply asserts that these folks once were "saved", but have subsequently lost their salvation. While this idea should be rejected because of its violation of several clear texts of scripture, it is, in some respects, a preferable and a more scriptural view than that described above! In some respects it presents a higher view of what constitutes salvation. At least it does not suggest that salvation has no necessary consequence on a man's outward life. Further, at least it tries to be consistent. For it stands to reason that if a man can will himself INTO a state of grace, he ought to be able to will himself OUT of that state! If "free will" is the determining factor in the matter, it ought to cut BOTH ways!

## **Free Grace**

Throughout this booklet we've been setting forth the scriptural position that we're not saved by "free will", but by "free grace". Salvation comes by the Sovereign disposition of God Almighty, not by the works or will of man. If it's not our works or our will that has placed us IN this state of grace, then it stands to reason that it's not our works or our will that will cause us to fall OUT of this state. If we are among those chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and called by the Spirit unto this thing we call salvation, what could possibly arise to cause us to be lost? God would have to be either unwilling or unable to save His elect, and the scripture makes it perfectly clear that neither of those is the case (e.g. John 10:27-29, Rom. 11:29, etc.). The love of the Savior is not fickle—here today and gone tomorrow. Those He loves, He loves "unto the end" (John 13:1). Without question, there's no possibility that the elect of God shall ever be lost!

However, there is question as to whether you, or I, or any other man who has professed faith in Christ is, in fact, one of the elect. Are there no evidences whereby we can ascertain whether or not our profession is genuine and real as opposed to being false and spurious? Well, in fact, there is. We find that Christ's "sheep" hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). Peter writes that we should make our "calling and election sure" by making certain that our knowledge of Christ is neither "barren nor unfruitful" (II Pet. 1:3-11). James warns us to make certain that our faith is not "dead" faith—mere mental assent that does not produce works in the outward life consistent with our profession (James 2:14-26). New life in Christ produces evidence in the out-ward life—evidence which is not a "flash in the pan", temporary, or fleeting. The evidence lasts because it reveals a new life in the heart—new life that is itself everlasting! Thus the elect will endure and persevere to the end, because the God Who began the work in them will continue to perform it (Phil. 1:6). They "keep on" because they are "kept" by the mighty Power of God (I Pet. 1:5). They persevere because they are "preserved in Jesus Christ" (Jude 1).



## **Evaluating Our Profession**

What are the ramifications of this doctrine? First, it allows us to give an answer to the condition of the man who seemingly once knew the Lord, but who today shows no evidence whatsoever of a genuine faith in Christ. Rather than asserting that he's actually saved but just carnal, or that he had salvation and lost it, we can say that he once had the APPEARANCE of salvation, but in time it proved false and spurious. Consider two houses, one of which is built on sand and the other on a rock, which from without look identical. However, when the storms of life beat upon both, when the trials and testings from without assault them equally, one falls while the other stands. Notice that the same storm which revealed that one of the houses had no foundation, also revealed that the other one did (Matt. 7:24-27). And the one that fell did not LOSE its foundation, it never HAD one! It just APPEARED to have one. Had we driven by and looked at it, we would have assumed that it had one. But the trial proved that it didn't. In like manner, the seed that fell and sprouted up quickly on the shallow soil, which withered away just as quickly when the hot Sun and hot wind blew upon it, didn't LOSE its root—it never HAD a root (Matt. 13:6)! The foolish virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom, whose lamps went out when he appeared, didn't LOSE their oil, they didn't HAVE any oil with them (Matt. 25:3)!

Yet let me hasten to add that the best of the saints may, AT TIMES, be "camal", walking after the "flesh", and, in general, living just like lost men live. Therefore we must not be too hasty in making a judgment that a profession is spurious at the first sign of carnality. For the moment, they may well be rebelling against God, balking against following Christ, striving against the Holy Spirit. However, the Christian, in the general direction of his life, is a man who "characteristically" follows His Lord. David committed both adultery and murder. Yet you wouldn't say that David was "characteristically" an adulterer and a murderer. "Characteristically" David was a man after God's own heart.

## **Looking in the Right Direction**

What about assurance of salvation? Is it possible, seeing that the saints must persevere to the end, to have any degree of true assurance in this life? So what, if today, I show evidence of a saving knowledge of Christ? After all, how do I know that I'll not turn out to be one of those who, like so many others, eventually fall away? This is the second and, perhaps, most important ramification of the doctrine. Not only is it possible for the saints to have assurance of their salvation, it's essential that they have at least some degree of assurance.

Assurance is of the essence of saving faith! We can hardly see Christ's work for sinners as a saving 'thing, and lay hold of Him as our hope, if such does not result in some measure of assurance! Further, without assurance that we are God's children, and are the recipients of His free grace and mercy, we cannot possibly live the Christian life as we ought. For both the duty to live as a Christian ought to live, and the motivation to perform that duty, presupposes the fact that I know myself to be the object of God's love, mercy, and grace. Evangelical "good" works can never flow out of the life of a man who's unsure of his standing with God—for he inevitably will perform them "in order" to be accepted by God, rather than "because" he's accepted. But back to our dilemma: How can I have such assurance, since I know that the elect must endure to the end, and I, if I know myself at all, know myself to be so weak?

Simple! The elect have assurance, not because they're sure of themselves, but because they are sure of God! They rest not in THEIR ability to persevere, but in GOD'S ability to preserve! Whether THEY are able to keep standing, they know not; but they're confident in GOD'S ability to keep them from falling! Whether THEY have the power to hold on to God to the end, they know not; but they're confident in GOD'S power to hold on to them, knowing that none are able to pluck them out of His Hand! Thus, come what may, they're confident of overcoming—not because they presumptuously rest in the power of their flesh, but because they rest in the power of God! Their eyes are fixed upon a Savior—a Savior Who is able to keep that which they've committed unto Him against that day!

## **Conclusion**

Soon after the Lord opened my eyes to see the truthfulness of what we call the "Doctrines of Grace", I had an interesting encounter with a young lady. I was pastoring a small Southern Baptist Church in Wyoming and this lady was serving in our state that year as a summer missionary. Towards the end of the summer, she came over to our church to help with our Vacation Bible School. The very first evening she was in town, while eating supper with us, she made the comment, "I've heard about you!" "Oh", I replied, "how so?" She went on to say, "I've heard about your 'election' stuff!"

It was then I began to understand what Paul meant, in describing the life of one who serves Christ, when he said in II Cor. 6:9, "As UNKNOWN, and yet WELL known" (My emphasis)! For the next thirty minutes or so, as best I could, I explained to her what I believed and why. I wasn't antagonistic or argumentative—which was unusual for me in those days—I just laid out the scriptural reasons for my faith. She listened politely, and when supper was over, she left to spend the night with another family in our church down the street. I didn't think too much more about it.

The next morning the young lady came down for breakfast and it was evident that she was quite upset. When quizzed by her host about what was the matter, she responded, "If what HE says is true, then I'm LOST!" Later that same morning, she came into contact with another lady in our church—one who was absolutely hostile to the Doctrines of Grace—and confessed her misery. This second lady loaded her into her car, drove her fifty miles to the next nearest Baptist pastor, who spent several hours assuring this young lady that all was well with her soul and that I was "all wet". By the time I even knew what had transpired, the young lady had gotten over her fears and, so far as I know, never had another qualm about the matter.

In analyzing this situation, I remember, at the time, being quite puzzled by her reaction. What was it that had so shaken her assurance of salvation? When MY eyes were opened to see the doctrine of unconditional election, I was filled with adoration and wonder. It was as if suddenly the answers to so many of the questions that had plagued me—not the least of which was "Why ME?"—were staring right at me. Suddenly I understood just what had happened to me many years earlier when I came to know the Lord. What a blessing, what a joy, and what a comfort this doctrine was! Yet the same doctrine that had ANSWERED my questions, RAISED questions for this young lady! The same doctrine which I saw as such a joy and comfort, she saw as a threat! What was going on? Why wouldn't the saints of God be delighted to learn that their Savior came into this world specifically to save them? Why wouldn't the knowledge that God chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world, purely according to His own grace and mercy, be a source of constant joy and blessing?

That was my first experience with a reaction I've seen many times since. In time, I think I have come to a better understanding of why people respond to these doctrines as they do. I think the answer is this: These teachings threaten the very righteousness they are trusting in for their salvation! If you think you are saved because YOU decided, YOU chose, YOU walked an aisle, etc., and if you are resting the hope of your soul upon YOUR decision, YOUR choice, YOUR action, whatever it was, these doctrines will be downright deadly to such a hope! Either you'll have to turn away from your false hopes, admitting your lost condition, and cast yourself on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, OR you must attack the doctrines (and the one proclaiming them) that are robbing you of the very ground of your hope before God!

Face it: Most folks out there on the street REALLY don't think they are going to Hell, however much they may joke or make light of it. Ninety-nine out of a hundred (An understatement if there ever was one!) don't lie asleep at night in agony of soul fearing that they are about to drop into Hell. And they have a REASON why they are sure such a thing will not happen to them, no matter how faulty and false that reason might be.

One man may have a MORAL reason: He's not a bad fellow, he's a good husband and father, he pays his taxes, or, as a rancher in Wyoming once told me, "I've never been arrested!" Another man may have a RELIGIOUS reason: He's been baptized, he goes to church, he prays, reads his Bible, and, in general, does what good religious folks do. Make no mistake about it, they ALL have a reason. Further, they TRUST in that reason—they have "faith"—they've banked the hope of their soul upon that reason. It's NOT that they've no faith, it's rather that their faith rests upon the wrong foundation.

These doctrines confront such a person with a very simple question: Is the reason that you believe you're going to miss Hell and make Heaven based upon something YOU'VE done, or something GOD'S done? Is your hope based upon something you've done FOR Him, or upon a work of grace that He's done IN you? Which is it, dear reader, in your case? Can you truly say, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' Blood and Righteousness"? All other ground is indeed "sinking sand". It will not support you in the day of judgment! If your hope is faulty, why not turn from it right now and flee to Christ? There He sits in the Heavens, at His Father's Right Hand, with all power in Heaven and earth in His Hands—power to SAVE you, and power to DAMN you! He is the Mighty Judge, holding the destinies of all men in His Hand—but He is also the Mighty Savior, able and willing to save sinners who disavow all other hopes and flee to Him for refuge from the wrath to come. What's to prevent you from casting yourself right now upon His mercy? Are you too sinful? No problem—He CAME to save sinners and promises to receive them! Are you too helpless? No problem—He saves by His power, not yours! Are you too filthy and vile to appear before Him? No problem—He grants to all who come naked to Him for dress the spotless robe of His own Righteousness! Do you have nothing with which to purchase this blessing? No problem—To those who come to Him with an empty, outstretched hand, trusting only in His promises and His work performed for sinners at the cross, He grants life and blessing as a free gift! Now what's to prevent you from doing so? Election? Predestination? Hardly! You'll not receive any sympathy in the day of judgment by pleading "election" as the reason you didn't come to Christ! Friend, ALL men are invited to come to Christ! God's eternal decrees do not BAR you from approaching Christ's throne! No, if you do not come, it's not "election" that's the problem, but something else. It's your old sinful, Satanic heart of pride that just cannot bring itself to abandon yourself and your own supposed works of righteousness as your hope before God. If you cannot stand before God in Heaven singing "I did it MY way", you would just as soon not go there! But the song of saints in Heaven is NOT "Worthy am I", but "Worthy is the LAMB"! No other song is known, desired, or allowed there! Why not turn from your false hopes, humble yourself before God, admitting what you are and the game you've been playing, and turn to Christ? Give up on yourself, no matter how self-abasing that might be, and look to Christ and Christ alone. Yes, there is a faith in Christ that SAVES the soul, praise God—but there is also a faith in ourselves that DAMNS! Which is it, dear reader, in your case?

By Mark Webb

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