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An Anatomy of Salvation, Part 1

Salvation's Origin

Knowledge of Origins does much when it comes to our understanding of the things of God's word. For example:

- In Galatians 1, our understanding of God's IRRESISTABLE GRACE grows immensely when we understand Paul's origins: The fact that He was zealous for His ancestral traditions such that no one but God could have changed his mind.
- In Hosea 11, our understanding of God's AMAZING GRACE deepens greatly when we understand their origin: The fact that they were as nothing in all the world, and yet God loved them.
- In Acts 4, our understanding of God's TRANSFORMING GRACE expands when we understand the origin of the apostles: The fact that they were simple fishermen and yet they boldly withstood the attacks of the religious leaders of their day.

Knowledge of origins is fundamental to a proper understanding of God's word. And yet, brothers and sisters, knowledge of Origins is crucial also to a healthy walk with God. Aren't there times in our lives when our hearts grow cold, our zeal wanes, or our love for God falters? Aren't there times when we are ready to throw up our hands and say, "I quit!" when it comes to service in the kingdom of God?

I doubt that there are few here today who couldn't identify with the words of this anonymous Puritan:

“Eternal Father, Thou are good beyond all thought, but I am vile, wretched, miserable, blind. My lips are ready to confess, but my heart is slow to feel, and my ways reluctant to amend... My faculties have been a weapon of revolt against Thee; as a rebel I have misused my strength, and served the foul adversary of Thy kingdom... I have seen the purity and beauty of Thy perfect law, the happiness of those in whose heart it reigns, the calm dignity of the walk to which it calls, yet I daily violate and contemn its precepts... All these sins I mourn and lament...”¹

Listen, the medicine prescribed by the word of God to the cold and hurting soul is the calling to mind the origin of our salvation! To a people whose love had grown cold, God says: “remember therefore from where you have fallen” (Revelation 2:5). Such is the impetus of the passage at which we are looking. Having referenced the fact that weakness² and unnamed problems³ are going to be a very real part of the believer’s life, Paul here is writing in order to comfort the child of God.

So what are the pastoral words which Paul intended to be of great support to the child of God facing difficulty, hardship, or trial?

Foreknowledge or Foresight?

Paul’s answer was to teach of the origin of our salvation. Notice where our salvation begins.

Romans 8:29, “**For whom he did foreknow**, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

This is the first word that Paul uses to denote the origin of our salvation: The foreknowledge of God.

Now as I have mentioned on previous occasions, many take this word to mean nothing more than foresight, and thus contend that the origin of salvation is God looking down the corridor of time and seeing what an individual is going to do beforehand. From this perspective, foreknowledge is God seeing our choice of Him and responding accordingly.

Now, while God does have perfect “foresight” with regard to history⁴ to take this as the origin of salvation creates some major problems.

The first problem is that this idea destroys the gospel. If the origin of salvation is God's foreseeing our choice of Him, then the basis/ground of salvation is NOT God's choice of us but OUR choice of Him! And yet, we read this in Scripture; God saved us.

2 Timothy 1:9, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

Romans 9:11, “(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth).

Secondly, it destroys the significance of the work of Christ.

¹ From Valley of Vision, page 70

² Compare Romans 8:26-27

³ Compare Romans 8:28

⁴ Compare Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17

1 Peter 1:20-21, "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God."

Now brothers and sisters, the same "foreknowledge" that served as the origin of our salvation is the same "foreknowledge" that served as the origin of Christ's death on the cross!

Now let me ask you, which is it? Did God simply look down history and foresee the death of Christ, and based on this death plan the salvation of His children? Or does God's foreknowledge of Christ include His providence by which He ordained Christ's death for sin?

If it is foresight in this case, much of the significance of Christ's death is destroyed. Christ did not come to save lost sinners, Christ simply died. However listen to the words of Peter.

Acts 2:23, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Indeed, to say that Christ was "foreknown" before the foundation of the world is to say that His death was DETERMINED before the foundation of the world. In fact, to "predetermine" is the primary way "foreknowledge" is used in the Septuagint.

Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

And thus, to understand God's "foreknowledge" in any other way is to destroy the significance of Christ's cross work.

And so, based on all of this we reject the notion that God's "foreknowledge" is simply His foresight of future events which leaves us with these questions:

- What then does "foreknowledge" mean?
- How is the origin of our salvation tied to it?

The word *foreknow* is a compound word in the Greek coming from two words: *pro*, meaning "before"; and *ginosko*, meaning "to know." Now in order to understand the significance of *foreknow* we need to understand the nuance of *ginosko*. And to do that, notice how it is used.

Genesis 4:17, "And Cain **knew** his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch."

The word *know* in the Septuagint is *ginosko*, a term denoting relationship.

Amos 3:2, "You only have I **known** of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Now, this doesn't mean that God is limited when it comes to His knowledge of those on this earth because He is Omniscient. Rather, this means that of all the peoples of the earth, only with Israel did God enter into a special, intimate relationship! We read the words of Christ to the reprobate on the last

days:

Matthew 7:23, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Again this doesn't mean that Christ had never heard of these unbelievers. But rather, that Christ did not have an intimate relationship with them as their Savior and Lord!

So based on its use in the Bible, *to know* references an intimate, love relationship with someone. And based on this, we conclude that to "Foreknow" is nothing less than to "fore-love!"

And thus from our text, to say that the origin of our salvation is tied to the "foreknowledge" of God is to say that before the world began when as yet we were nothing⁵, God set His love upon us! God's "fore-love" of us is the origin of our Salvation!

Now brothers and sisters, this is so important to understand. As temporal beings, when we think of love, we think of it in a temporal way. There was a time when we didn't love our

- Spouse.
- Children.
- Dog or cat.

Now, when we think of God's love for us, typically it is according to this temporal love! When we read John 3:16, we read of God's love for us and conclude that one day, as we were going along in our lives something about us attracted God so He set His love upon us and therefore we are saved.

Now brothers and sisters, when things are going fine in our lives, this theology works.

- When we haven't sinned too badly.
- When we've been relatively good.
- When things are going well.
- When we have our health.
- When our job is secure.
- Etc.

But let our lives sour. Let us

- Sin what appears to us to be that "unforgivable sin."
- Deny God.
- Or, let our lives get difficult.
- Illness.
- A lost Job.
- A tragedy.

And in come the questions, "Does God still love me?" How could God love me in light of this sin? How could God love me in light of my betrayal? How could God love me and allow this to happen?

⁵ Compare Ephesians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 1:9

Listen, to all battling with similar questions, a greater understanding of the origin of our Salvation; God's fore-love addresses these questions. When we are beset by sin and wondering if God could still love us we must ask and answer the question, "When God set His love upon us when as yet we were not, how were we contemplated in His mind: Sinful or sinless?"

Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

The objects of God's fore-love were and are SINFUL BEINGS! And thus for all in Christ, there is no amount of sin that can separate us from the love of God.

- Not your past sin.
- Not your present sin.
- Not even your future sin!

And to the child of God who doubts God's love on account of the circumstances of their lives, recall the same foreknowledge that served as the basis of your salvation is the same foreknowledge that serves as the basis of your present

- Conflict.
- Trial.
- Persecution.
- Difficulty.
- Suffering.

It is a loving providence that has ordained all that is in your life!

Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee [God's foreknowledge that leads to]; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

God's appointing of Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations, an appointing housed in His love for him, included suffering!

Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

Oh brothers and sisters whatever may be the lot of your life this day remember from where you have fallen- "God has loved you from all eternity!" That is the origin of your salvation! And yet, this is but half of the picture.

Predestination

Notice secondly that which constitutes the origin of our salvation is in predestination.

Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, **he also did predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

The word used here for *predestinate* literally means "to set the boundaries beforehand." It is from this

and other such passages that the doctrine of predestination arises.

There is much controversy when it comes to the teaching of this verse. Questions abound:

- If our salvation is a matter of predestination, then are we simply machines?
- Does not the call of salvation imply a freedom on the part of man to choose?
- If the doctrine of predestination is true, especially when it comes to salvation, why do we need to
 - Pray?
 - Share the faith?
 - Send out missionaries?

In the immortal words of Rachel Lind from *Anne of Green Gables*, “If predestination is true, why are we wasting money sending all those missionaries to Africa?”

To begin answering these questions, we must begin by defining what Paul means when he says that God “predestined us...” As we said, the word *predestined*⁶ means “to set the boundaries beforehand.” And thus, it means to mark out, appoint, or determine beforehand. It is used in reference to our salvation.

Ephesians 1:5, “Having **predestinated** us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

Ephesians 1:11, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being **predestinated** according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

It is also used in reference to the events surrounding the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:7, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God **ordained before** the world unto our glory.”

It is used in reference to the nations.

Acts 4:28, “For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel **determined before** to be done.”

And thus, to “predestine” is to determine in advance. As an activity of God, it refers to His ordering of all things in this world unto a particular end. Now as evident from our text, when it comes to an individual's salvation in Christ that too is subject to the pre-choice of God.

1 John 4:19, “We love him, because he first loved us.”

Acts 13:48, “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

1 Peter 2:8, “And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.”

⁶ προοριζω proorizo

John 6:65, "And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father."

Philippians 1:29, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

And so we conclude that when it comes to salvation, its origin resides in God's pre-determined plan! Those who are saved are saved NOT because of their choice of God BUT because of God's choice of them! New life through the blood of Christ does not come from "the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13).

Now, as clear as this doctrine may be in Scripture, it nevertheless is hotly rejected on account of what it seems to imply. As we have already asked, does this truth mean

- Prayer is of little significance?
- We shouldn't share the gospel?
- All are as robots before God?

Before we can bask in light of the beauty of the Doctrine of God's Predestination as it relates to our Salvation, we first must answer these questions.

Why pray? Why evangelize?

Because God calls us to!

1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing."

2 Timothy 4:5, "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, **do the work of an evangelist**, make full proof of thy ministry."

Are we just robots/puppets?

NO! While on the one hand we boldly and rightly confess the doctrine of God's predestination on the other hand, we also insist on human culpability and responsibility when it comes to man's actions.

- Matthew 7:5-6; James 4:2, 3: If we do not ask, we will not receive!
- James 5:16: If the righteous do not pray, things will not take place!
- Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 7:9: If the single does not marry, he will continue to "burn"- in the words of Paul!
- Romans 10:14: If we do not preach, others will not hear!

That which separates the doctrine of God's providence from fate is the Biblical element of responsibility on the part of creation. Or to put it another way; just as the doctrine of God's predestination is true so also is the doctrine of moral responsibility on the part of creation. Both beautifully co-exist- BOTH are TRUE!

And thus I witness knowing that NOT to witness is disobedience, and that people won't hear the gospel.

I pray knowing that NOT to pray is disobedience, and that for which I would have prayed probably will not occur.

And how does this fit together? How does human responsibility fit together with Divine providence?

I Don't Know! Yet, this should not bother us, for if we could understand the Lord in His entirety- if we could

- Plunge the depths of His wisdom.
- Ascend the heights of His love.
- Grasp His holiness.
- Understand His eternal, infinite, unchangeable nature.

Then, GOD WOULD NOT BE OUR GOD BUT OUR CONTEMPORARY!

And so there will be mystery when it comes to the finite seeking to understand the Infinite the creature trying to comprehend the Creator!

Yet our task remains always the same: To speak where God has spoken, and to remain silent where He has remained silent- and so on the one hand, I confess the doctrine of God's predestination on the other hand, I confess the doctrine of human responsibility. And it trust God to reconcile the two!

And all of this brings us back to the truth of this text that the origin of our salvation rests in the predetermined plan of God!

What difference does this make for us today?

Remember the context of this passage, the reality of weakness, difficulty, hardship, and suffering! It was Paul's contention that this truth was that which hurting people needed to hear.

And so it is, for notice foreknowledge is a wonderful doctrine, but without power it is vain sentimentality. Yet such is not the case with God in light of His Predetermined Will! Because we understand that God has ordained all things, those upon whom God has set His love will certainly be saved.

Conformed to Christ

And yet there's more!

Consider that which governs God's predetermined will. It is that we might be, "...conformed to the image of His Son."

In every providence; be it bitter or sweet, God is working toward that which I believe is one of our greatest desires as Christians... CHRIST LIKENESS! Accordingly we are left this day with no other obligation than to TRUST the wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and love of God. And yet of all callings this is one of the more difficult ones. Accordingly, Peter exhorted a group of persecuted Christians with these words:

1 Peter 4:19, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God **commit the keeping**

of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

Such remains the calling of each and every one of us this day. In light of the glorious origin of salvation, we must endeavor to rely upon God- His name/character- when understanding is not forthcoming.

Brothers and sisters, as we contemplate the anatomy of our salvation, allow Its origin to encourage you!

Because our Salvation is based upon

- The Foreknowledge, and
- The Pre-ordained plan of God.

We dare lift our heads in faith to God- knowing that

- He has loved us from all eternity.
- And from all eternity He has planned to save us!

In the words of Paul, “If God is for us, who is against us?”(Romans 8:31). And so to all struggling in their walks, I say, “Remember from where you have fallen!”(Revelation 2:5).

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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