



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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## HOW GREAT A SALVATION, Part 1

### Understanding the *Ordo Salutis* [Order of Salvation] of God

Romans 8:28-30

June 15, 2008

- I. The Plan of Salvation is God's Plan
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- Over the next several weeks, we will be taking a biblical look at the doctrine of Salvation, technically referred to as *Soteriology*.
- Specifically, we are going to examine **Romans 8:28-30**, as well as other pertinent Scriptural passages, examining our salvation in terms of the *Ordo Salutis*, that is the "Order of Salvation."
- Examining the Scriptures, the "Order of Salvation" we see is as follows:
  - 1.) The Covenant of Redemption [Decrees of God]
  - 2.) Election
  - 3.) The Outward Gospel Call
  - 4.) Regeneration
  - 5.) Faith / Repentance
  - 6.) Justification
  - 7.) Adoption
  - 8.) Sanctification
  - 9.) Perseverance
  - 10.) Death
  - 11.) Glorification
- Upon close study of the *Ordo Salutis* one gains a much deeper understanding of the incredible grace of God which called us to know Him personally through His plan of Salvation.

- Furthermore, one is reminded of how God works all things together in a purposeful, deliberate, and orderly manner.

□ As with all aspects of theology, central to a proper understanding of salvation is the embracing of God's absolute sovereignty within His Creation. He alone created all that exists out of nothing and sustains everything by His will alone. Consequently, this is His creation and He makes the rules. God is in control; we are not. This truth is the most *freeing* statement that we can ever embrace! Further, this is the truth that clearly emerges from the biblical testimony and one that guides every aspect of our lives.

- Moreover, what is equally clear is that salvation is wholly a work of God's grace.
- Yet, many questions emerge when the emphasis, regarding our salvation, is placed upon God rather than man. Each of these is commonplace in the modern church that, far too often, seems opposed to the biblical truth of God's sovereign reign.
  - If God is sovereign in all things, including salvation then isn't man simply reduced to being a "robot?"
  - If God is absolutely sovereign, then why evangelize and why pray?
  - If God is sovereign, then man no longer has free will.
  - If God has already planned everything out, then I can act any way that I want. It does not matter, because if I am chosen, then I am chosen. If not, it does not really matter how I act either.
  - God's absolute sovereignty seems to lead to a sort of fatalism, or fatalistic determinism.
  - One prominent theologian has even stated that if God is absolutely sovereign in all things, including our salvation, then that would make him a "divine rapist," forcing his will on ours.
  - Also, others state, if God is absolutely sovereign, then God is the author of sin.
  - If God is sovereign in salvation, then His "choosing" of certain people for salvation is "arbitrary", "random."
- Also, there are many sayings that abound in the modern Church. Many of them sound great to many, they even "preach well", but tragically, they are fundamentally unbiblical. Some of them include:
  - "God has taken nine steps toward you; you must make one step towards him."
  - "You are drowning and God has thrown you a 'life-saver' in Jesus Christ; you must reach out and grab it, then you will be saved."

- “In the courtroom of heaven, Christ has cast one vote for you; Satan has cast another; it is up to you to make the final, deciding vote.”
- “You are on your deathbed, and dying of a fatal, terminal disease; then, in walks Christ, with the only antidote to save you. He places it on your lips. All you need to do is trust what he has given you and swallow the antidote, then you will live.”
- Consequently, when one looks to the Scriptures as the sole basis for understanding salvation, one thing is clear: **Salvation begins with God alone and finds its fulfillment in Him alone.**
- Possibly no other passage in all of Scripture speaks of God’s plan of salvation explicitly and clearly than in Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians.

**Ephesians 1:3-12** states, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His 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 on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.”

- Often times, when we consider God’s Plan of Salvation, we speak in terms of the **Covenant of Redemption**. Typically, when theologians refer to this Covenant, they speak in terms of an agreement between the Father and the Son, prior to creation, in eternity past. However, it certainly involves all three Persons of the Godhead. It is a truth that most certainly magnifies the whole of the Godhead, the Trinity.

“Theologians speak of...a covenant...among the members of the Trinity. This covenant they call the ‘covenant of redemption.’ It is an agreement among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in which the Son agreed to become a man, be our representative, obey the demands of [the Law] on our behalf, and pay the penalty of sin, which we deserved.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

## I. The Plan of Salvation is God’s Plan

- The first point that one must grasp when seeking to understand salvation is that our salvation is part of a plan, and **that plan is God’s**.
- The plan of salvation originated with God and finds its fulfillment in Him alone.

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- Since the plan of salvation is God’s plan, it bears the very **characteristics of Him** as well.

1. First of all, it is, like God Himself, **perfect**.

- At first, this sounds great; however, if there is one thing fallen human nature rejects the most, it is perfection.
- One of the main reasons for this is that perfection is fundamentally different from anything else in our world. As humans, we are attracted to that which is like us; yet, perfection is as different from us as one can possibly imagine.
- In fact, this is why Christ was rejected. He was perfect. As a result, He did not fit the “mold” or fulfill the human expectations of the Jewish hierarchy and leadership of His day. Therefore, they crucified Him.

2. Secondly, however, since the plan of salvation is perfect, it is also **unchangeable** and **fixed**.

- This is, quite possibly, the one attribute of God, and His plan of salvation, that makes the most professing Christians the most uncomfortable.
- Even as fully grown adults, many, professing Christians are more like young children when it comes to our relationship with God our Father.
  - We truly believe that God should take into consideration, when He makes certain decisions, what *we* think.
  - In other words, we believe that there are times when God’s decisions would actually be better if he took into consideration our perspective.
  - We even believe that He would be more “fair” if He would negotiate with us.
    - In fact, this is the problem that is seems most Christians have with God acting in a completely sovereign manner with respect to salvation: they say it is, in some way, “unfair.”
    - Yet, in the coming weeks, we will examine the concept of what is “fair” with respect to salvation. In short, if God were “fair” NO ONE would be saved!

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Again, the idea that His decrees are fixed, unchangeable, and immovable, terrifies most of us. Yet, it should actually comfort us! For they are perfect!</li></ul>
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- Tragically, though, what most Christians seem to want is an impotent, weak, and changeable god who can be manipulated based upon our ever-changing desires and motives. We, far too often, in our heart of hearts, believe that in God’s created order, everything should be, in some way, negotiable.
  - This is why, when I teach Bible studies in organizations outside this church, one of the most controversial statements that I can make is, “We cannot change God’s mind.” Yet, this truth applies to all aspect of God [because He and His decrees are perfect, and consequently, do not change].
  - Once more, we are often like children who think we know better what we need than our parents. [Yet, consider the “gap” (in terms of intelligence, wisdom, and maturity) between a parent and a child and compare that to the infinite “gap” between even a fully-grown adult Christian and God Himself.]
- However, to expect God to conform to what *we* think He should do, is as foolish [or, technically even more foolish] as a piece of clay saying to the potter, “Why did you make me this way?” [Romans 9:19-21]
  - Again, God’s immutability [unchangeableness] in all His decrees should be the source of great comfort for all His people!
3. Thirdly, since salvation is God’s plan, it is **guaranteed to be successful**, for God cannot fail – it is fundamentally against His nature.
- One of the main reasons for this truth is because God is not bound by anything, except His own very nature [that is, the only thing He *cannot do* is violate His own nature].
  - He is not bound by time and space, for He is eternal. **HE IS** past, present, and future.
  - Again, however, this view, although it sounds good, when the “rubber meets the road,” is not comfortable to many professing believers.
  - For example, in a wildly popular book published in 2001, which has sold over 500,000 copies, author John Eldridge writes:

“God is a person who takes immense risks...It’s not the nature of God to limit His risks and cover His basis...As with every relationship, there’s a certain amount of unpredictability. God’s willingness to risk is just astounding. There is definitely something wild in the heart of God.”

*Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man’s Soul*

- Statements like this are so attractive, and so “heart-warming” to so many people, because they make God more “like us.” They make God easier to relate to. Yet,

what they do is actually create a completely different god...one that is not biblical or worthy of worship or praise.

**II. The Plan Occurred Prior to Creation**

- ❑ The next point that we must understand with regard to God’s plan of salvation is that it occurred **prior to creation**.
- ❑ That is to say, it is an eternal plan, originating outside of the limited realm of time and space.
- ❑ Furthermore, since God’s plan of salvation originated prior to creation, the only Being in existence was God. Therefore, the Plan of salvation was **purely God’s plan** – with no other influence.

**III. The Plan was Based on the Counsel of God’s Will**

- ❑ The next point that is clear from the testimony of Scripture is that God’s plan of Salvation was based **“on the counsel of His will.”**
- ❑ What is clear from this is that “the counsel” of God’s will necessitates a plurality of persons. It necessitates the Trinity.

❑ In other words, **biblical salvation is impossible apart from the reality of the Trinity.**

❑ **Thus, in eternity past, the three Persons of the Godhead “counseled” together, in order to plan out the salvation of God’s people.**

- ❑ See Ephesians 1:11; Isaiah 46:10; Daniel 4:35.

“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,  
But **He does according to His will in the host of heaven**  
And among the inhabitants of earth;  
And no one can ward off His hand  
Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” Daniel 4:35 [emphasis added]

“...declaring the end from the beginning  
and from ancient times things not yet done,  
saying, **‘My counsel shall stand,**  
and **I will accomplish all my purpose,**” Isaiah 46:10, ESV [emphasis added]

“also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,**” Ephesians 1:11 [emphasis added]

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- ❑ One of the attacks against God's sovereign election is that His choices seem arbitrary, random. In other words, He chooses some to salvation [arbitrarily]; yet, passes over others [arbitrarily].

❑ However, it is impossible for God to act in an arbitrary manner, for such is contrary to His nature.

❑ Yet, there is a reason why God planned salvation in the manner He did. There is a reason why God graciously chose some to salvation – we simply do not know why.

❑ Again, the Scriptures state that God's decisions in salvation are **based on the counsel of His will**. Thus, the reason why God has acted in the manner He has is hidden to us, for it is based on the counsel of the Persons of the Trinity in eternity past.

- ❑ This should not surprise us, though. For, the Scriptures clearly state that His ways are higher than ours, and His thoughts higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9).
- ❑ Once again, we are often like children who believe that God, in some way owes us an explanation, in a manner that makes sense to us, why He acts the way He does.
- ❑ Yet, He calls us simply to trust Him, knowing that He is God, and we are not.

#### **IV. The Plan Involved All Three Persons of the Godhead**

- ❑ Next, the Scriptures reveal that in God's plan of Salvation, not only is it according to the counsel of God's will, but **the execution of the plan** involves all three Persons of the Godhead.
- ❑ Once again, we see the necessity of the Trinity.
- ❑ In the execution of the Covenant of Redemption, God's *active* nature is powerfully revealed.
- ❑ Through the outworking of God's plan of Redemption God **actively pursues and saves His people**.
- ❑ He does not passively standby, hoping that people will exercise the will in favor of choosing Him over all of the other options available to them.
  - Yet, this appears to be the common view of salvation today.
  - Consequently, it seems that many professing Christians would rather have a passive god who yields his sovereign will to the will of his people rather than an omnipotent Sovereign LORD who actively pursues His people in accordance with His perfect, unchanging will.

- Consider the very name of God, YHWH, which is a verb [“I AM”, from the root meaning “to be”]. In other words, the very name of God denotes action, activity; for God is “pure act.” It runs completely contrary to God’s nature to passively “sit back” with respect to His creation.
- Therefore, in the unfolding of God’s plan for salvation, we see a **functional distinction**, even a **functional hierarchy** in the Persons of the Godhead.
- That is to say that the Son and the Holy Spirit are *functionally subordinate* to the Father, ultimately obeying His will in the fulfillment of the Covenant of Redemption.
- NOTE: This does NOT mean that the Son and the Holy Spirit are, in their essence, any less than the Father.
- It simply means that in the fulfillment of the Covenant of Redemption, the Son and the Holy Spirit agreed, voluntarily, to submit to the will of the Father. That is to say, that the Father is fully God; the Son is fully God; and the Holy Spirit is fully God. Yet, in the outworking of the plan of Redemption, in their functions, there is a hierarchy.
  - Such a truth exists in human relationships as well.
  - Just as a father and son are equal in their essence, in that they are both human; sons are called to obey their fathers, being *functionally subordinate* to their fathers while at the same time being also *ontologically equal*.

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- From the biblical testimony, the functions of the Persons of the Godhead, with respect to salvation, are as follows:

**The Father:**

- The Father gave to His Son all that He was to save (John 17:2, 6).
- The Father sent the Son into the world to be the representative of His people He [the Father] had chosen (John 3:16; Romans 5:18-19).
- The Father “prepared a body for the Son to dwell in as a man.” (Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 10:5)
- The Father gave His Son all authority in Heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18).
- The Father also gave the Son the authority to pour out the Holy Spirit upon His people, thus applying the benefit of His [the Son’s] work to them (Acts 1:4; 2:33).
- The Father also providentially protected His Son throughout His earthly ministry ensuring that He not die prior to the pre-appointed time [Acts 2:23].



- The Father agreed to exhaust His wrath on His Son in order to save His people (Isaiah 53:10-11).

**The Son:**

- The Son agreed to come into this world, assuming the nature of man, and live under and fulfill the Mosaic Law (Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 2:14-18).
- The Son agreed to be perfectly obedient to all the commands of the Father (Hebrews 10:7-9). Thus, Christ became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8).
- The Son also agreed to lose none whom the Father had given Him (John 6:39; 17:12). He did so by bearing the Father’s wrath “to the end” (John 13:1).
- The Son agreed to become the substitutionary atoning sacrifice for all of His people; voluntarily submitting to His Father’s will and fully exhausting the Father’s wrath for all of His people.

“[Jesus said] This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.” John 6:44

**The Holy Spirit:**

- The Holy Spirit agreed to accomplish the will of the Father by indwelling and enabling the human Christ to carry out his work on this earth (Matthew 3:16; Luke 4:1, 14, 18; John 3:34).
- He also agreed to apply the benefits of Christ’s work to His people after the resurrection and ascension of Christ (John 14:16-17, 26; Acts 1:8; 2:17-18, 33). This, the Holy Spirit accomplishes through the regeneration and sanctification of God’s people.

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- Yet, one must also consider the perfect consistency in the Persons of the Godhead as well:
  - That is to say that, if the work of the Persons of the Trinity in salvation is consistent, then:

Those the Father chooses [before the foundation of the world, according to the counsel of His will] are the same as  
 Those the Son lived and died for are the same as  
 Those the Holy Spirit Regenerates and Sanctifies

- Such a harmony within the Godhead demonstrates the perfect unity in the Covenant of Redemption.

**V. Ultimately, the Plan of Salvation is for God's Glory Alone**

- Ultimately, the plan of salvation is for God's glory alone.
- When one ultimately realizes that salvation is wholly a work of God's grace, then he is left to simply glorify God for what *He* alone has done.

As author David Clotfelter, in his book *Sinners in the Hands of a Good God* writes:

“I am reminded that my salvation does not lie in ‘self-actualization,’ the boosting of my self-esteem, learning ‘to be true to’ myself, or discovering the depths of my own creativity. My salvation involves getting *out* of myself and growing deeper in my relationship with God, in whom there is infinite wisdom and infinite joy, at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore. **God is not watching with bated breath to see what wonderful new use I will make of my freedom. God is inviting me to lose myself, forget myself, and experience the far superior pleasure of knowing Him.**”

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- In conclusion, I have personally read few, if any analogies that better describe God's sovereign work in salvation better than this one, again, from David Clotfelter's *Sinners in the Hands of a Good God*:

**The Adults are in Charge!**

“Imagine for a moment a young boy who is the center of his parents’ universe. They dote on him shamelessly: they give him every toy he asks for, they bend their rules to protect him from the consequences of his misbehavior, they tremble at his tantrums, and they receive with adoring wonder every precocious pronouncement from his lips and every messy product of his creative genius. Within his own small world, this boy is emperor.

But now suppose that some courageous friend takes these parents aside and warns them that they must change their ways if they do not want to produce a monster, and suppose further that the parents are wise enough to listen to this advice.

Things start changing around the house. Some demands are met with a firm “No!” Tantrums are ignored, or at least not rewarded. Rules are made by the parents, not the child, and when he breaks the rules, he suffers for it. Not only that but the parents begin placing their marriage back at the center of family life: They work at their relationship with one another; they make their decisions together, and instead of assimilating themselves to their child’s mentality, they guide him to learn to live in their world.

They do not love their son any less than before. They would gladly lay down their lives for him. But, they have decided to live according to the truth that the adults, not the children, should be in charge of the family.

At first the boy doesn't like it. He has lost some of his power and he tries to wrest it back. He pouts and screams. He holds his breath till his face turns blue.

His parents do not relent, however, and over time the boy actually becomes happier and more secure than he ever was under the old arrangement. He is secretly relieved to live under adult-made rules that cannot be changed by his whining. He experiences the satisfaction that comes from learning to wait and to work for the things he wants.

He is not threatened by his parents love for one another; he is comforted by it. It makes him happy to know that his very life is a product of that love. Every hug his parents give one another makes him feel just that much more secure, because he know that their love for him is grounded in their love for one another. Most important, he sees that the world he can create for himself is small and pathetic compared to the world his parents inhabit, and he learns to enjoy the process of growing up.

The analogy is far from perfect, but it suggests something of what I have experienced in accepting [a biblical view] of the world. Meditating on this view, I am reminded that the Holy Trinity existed in perfect love and joy before there was a universe, and that the creation, of which I am a part, is a product of that overflowing love and joy. I am reminded also that God's love toward me flows from the joy He has in being God.

Thus, His supreme commitment to Himself and His own glory, far from threatening me or making me insignificant, confirms to me that I am eternally secure. God does not love me because He needs me; He loves me because He has ordained my existence as an expression of His own glory.”

pp. 251-252