

SOTERIOLOGY (11)

Actually, there are two main motivational directions one may take in considering God's provision of salvation—the legal motivation and the personal motivation. This specific question has more to do with God's personal reasons for providing salvation.

According to the Scriptures, there are some very clear personal reasons why God provided salvation:

Reason #1 - God provided salvation because of His love.

Dr. Chafer said this: "The greatest of all motives which actuates God in the exercise of His saving grace is the satisfying of His own infinite love for those ruined by sin" (Vol. 3, p. 7).

How is it possible for God to demonstrate love to a sinner, when sin cannot have any relationship with God except be the object of His hate and wrath? The answer is the provisionary work of Jesus Christ on Calvary, the provision of salvation. Here is the ultimate fulfillment of divine love in that it makes salvation possible for depraved sinners.

There are several passages that teach us that God's love motivated Him to provide a salvation possibility:

- 1) John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."
- 2) Romans 5:8 - "But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
- 3) Ephesians 2:4-5 - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."
- 4) I John 3:1 - "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are."
- 5) I John 4:9 - "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him."

God's love was clearly a primary motive for providing salvation. This point is very clear and there is no difficulty seeing it from these verses. The theological difficulty comes when one tries to determine why God loved such an unlovely and ungodly people to such a degree that He was willing to provide a salvation that would cost Him the sacrifice of His only begotten Son.

Since God is the only Sovereign God, He can do whatever He wants. The difficulty is why did His love make such a salvation possible when it demanded the ultimate sacrifice of the life of His only Son? Couldn't an expression of love be much less?

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We may make two observations:

(Observation #1) - The central reason for this demonstration of love is not determined by the beauty of the object loved.

In other words, God was not moved to love at this level because the world is so lovable and beautiful in His estimation. In fact, this point is oftentimes stressed by God with His own people.

1) Deut. 7:7-8 - This was certainly true concerning Israel (Jude 20, 21).

2) Rom. 5:6-8 - This was certainly true concerning those who are lost.

3) Eph. 2:1-4 - This was certainly true concerning those who are saved.

God's Word covers all the bases. It was not the lovely condition of the object loved that moved God to love it.

(Observation #2) - The central reason for this demonstration of love is the infinite, perfect nature of divine love.

As we have seen in our study of Theology Proper, God is unlimited and perfect. A love that stems from the heart of God must fit the unlimited perfections of God. In order for love to be unlimited and perfect, it must, by very definition, reach out in an ultimate form to those who are totally unlovely and who have done nothing or are incapable of doing anything to merit the love. The ultimate expression of divine love is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (I Peter 1:18-19). It is in this perfect sacrifice that God's love finds its ultimate expression.

The love of God is a key biblical reason for the provision of salvation. It is, however, important to realize that love is at its highest level when the sacrifice is made in behalf of those who are of no value or beauty. Those who think God provided salvation because they were so valuable make a major miscalculation concerning God's love. The love of God, being infinite and perfect, demands the sacrifice be for those who aren't valuable. The Apostle Paul clearly made this point when he wrote: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

There is no doubt that God provided salvation because of His love for us when we were totally and completely unlovely and sinful.

Reason #2 - God provided salvation because of His grace .

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer said, "...salvation is a divine undertaking on the basis of pure grace in which no human works or merit may enter. The fact that man's salvation is by divine grace to the end that the grace of God may have an adequate manifestation" (Vol. 3, pp. 7-8).

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There are many passages that teach that God provided salvation because of His grace:

- 1) John 1:17 - "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ."
- 2) Romans 3:24 - "Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."
- 3) Romans 5:20 - "And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

Perhaps the most powerful text in all the New Testament that emphatically stresses this point is Ephesians 2:5-9. The whole system of salvation and the individual saving of a soul is a powerful demonstration of the pure grace of God. In fact, according to Ephesians 2:7, one purpose for salvation is that even in the ages to come, the fact that people are saved will demonstrate God's grace forever.

What this practically means is in eternity, when one human being sees another human being enjoying the rich blessings of everlasting life, each will remind the other of the grace of God which allows any human being into the presence of God's eternity. Every saved human being becomes, as Charles Ryrie states, "...a special trophy of God's grace forever" (*Basic Theology*, p. 277).

The word "grace" has its focus on the concept that the grace and kindness of God is that which provided salvation for sinful human beings. The word "mercy" has its special focus on the pitiable and miserable condition of sinful man and the compassion God demonstrated when He provided salvation. Both terms are closely related, but there is a shade of difference. Grace emphasizes God's kindness in providing salvation, whereas mercy emphasizes God's kindness in providing salvation for creatures so pitiable.

The words of Dr. Chafer are worth noting here:

"There is an objective in God's exercise of His saving grace which is far more a reality to God than either good works or man's own benefit. It is the fact that man's salvation is by divine grace to the end that the grace of God may have an adequate manifestation. ... There was that in God which no angel had ever seen. They had observed His wisdom and power displayed in the creation and upholding of all things. They had beheld His glory, but they had not seen His grace. There could be no manifestation of divine grace until there were sinful creatures who were objects of grace. The importance, in heavenly realms, of the unveiling of infinite grace could not be estimated in this world. There was no complete exhibition of divine love until God gave His Son to die for lost men. The momentousness of that demonstration is also beyond human understanding. In like manner, there could be no complete exhibition of divine grace until sinners were saved through the death of God's Son, and the measure of that grace is also beyond finite understanding.

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The thought transcends all comprehension, that even one from this fallen sinful race will be so changed by divine power that he will be satisfying to God as an exhibition of His infinite grace, and, though the vast spaces of heaven be thronged with such, the demonstration is not enhanced by multiplied representations, for each individual will be the expression of God's superlative grace" (Vol. 3, p. 8).

God's grace is another reason why God provided salvation.

Reason #3 - God provided salvation because of His mercy .

As we have already discussed, God's mercy is closely related to God's grace. Mercy seems to emphasize the helpless and hopeless state that the objects of God's grace are in.

One key passage that emphasizes the mercy motive for providing salvation is Titus 3:5. It is specifically stated in this verse that God's motive for providing salvation had nothing to do with our righteous lives or deeds, but rather had completely to do with the mercy of God.

True biblical doctrine recognizes that salvation was provided solely on the basis of God's character, not our character. True biblical doctrine also recognizes the worthless, helpless and sinful state of the objects of divine mercy and grace.

Salvation demonstrates God's infinite pity to sinful people who are all in a miserable condition according to God's estimation. Salvation makes a statement about the mercy of God.

Those who place the value of their salvation on themselves are missing the whole point of their salvation. Biblical salvation is designed to make powerful statements about God, not about the one saved. It seems to me that either through pride or ignorance or a combination of both, the vast majority of people claiming to be saved have totally missed this important doctrinal point.

Reason #4 - God provided salvation because of His wisdom .

The Apostle Paul really captured this point when, after writing down the whole doctrine of the Gospel which saves, he burst into these words: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Romans 11:33).

One passage that clearly focuses on the matter of salvation being distinctly related to the wisdom of God is I Cor. 1:18-25. For God to design a plan of salvation for sinners which does not violate any of His perfections is an amazing plan rooted in the depths of the infinite wisdom of God.

When all is carefully contemplated by those spiritual, there will be the realization that there is no greater demonstration of the infinite wisdom of God than God's program of salvation.

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When we consider that salvation is a plan that includes identifying sin and dealing with sin so that God's holiness is not violated, and when we consider that God redeems man so His love, grace, mercy and wisdom is fully demonstrated, we must, with Paul, burst out—"Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God."

Reason #5 - God provided salvation because of His character .

It is very clear that one of the motives behind salvation is the character and reputation of God. To simply state the point, people who have been saved have been saved to demonstrate God's character to this world.

Salvation is not by works, but one who is saved has been saved unto good works and is to manifest a lifestyle that reflects the character of God to this world.

There are several passages that make this point clear:

1) Ephesians 2:10 - When we are saved we are the workmanship of God and we are to demonstrate this by our walk and by our life.

2) Titus 3:8 - It is very clear that our godly lifestyle, after we have believed, is profitable for others. When godly character is demonstrated, it can and does make a profound impact on other people. It is important to recognize that Paul is teaching Titus that when each age group lives out its faith, it actually demonstrates the grace of God to men and they literally see God's character and salvation (Titus 2:10-11; 3:1-9).

Our godly lives and good works become exhibit "A" of God's saving grace. It is imperative that we recognize that we have been saved to demonstrate God's character to others. There is much on the line in the salvation of a soul.

This point, in my estimation, is very critical and often overlooked, even by those who have walked with the Lord for many years. There are many who postulate the idea that the main point of salvation is that the person is saved and no longer going to hell. Certainly, we would agree that this is a very significant reason for coming to faith in Jesus Christ. However, it needs to be stressed to one who comes to faith in Christ, that God is the One who saves a person unto good works. Salvation is not just to get a person from point "A" earth to point "B" heaven. God has saved a person so he might become a reflection of God's character on earth.

It is absolutely clear from the N.T. that God wants a believer to grow and mature so that he blossoms into a complete, well-developed portrait of the grace of God. Never was any N.T. biblical writer content with just the knowledge that he was saved from hell. In fact, time and time again they teach and stress it is imperative for believers to grow and for the church to become mature:

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- A. I Cor. 3:1-3 - Paul is obviously rebuking the Corinthian church because it is not mature.
- B. Eph. 4:11-16 - Paul is teaching the Ephesian church that they are to develop into a mature, strong body that is doctrinally stable.
- C. Phil. 3:13-14 - Paul himself saw a need in his own life to continue to grow, mature and develop.
- D. Col. 1:9-14 - Paul wanted the Colossians to grasp deep knowledge so they could demonstrate a worthy, mature, strong testimony.
- E. Heb. 6:1 - The writer of Hebrews wanted more than surface faith.

One of the reasons why every believer is to grow and mature is so he may reflect the character of God (Col. 3:10).

Reason #6 - God provided salvation because of man's destiny.

All men have wandered away from the righteous standards of God (Is. 53:6; I Pet. 2:25). All have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, all men deserve the wrath of God and, in fact, are heading for the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18; Eph. 2:3).

What all of this means is that unless God provides some system of salvation, all men are on their way to eternal damnation. All men, apart from some salvation system of God, are heading to hell. All men can and will go to hell on their own merit for all have sinned.

When one realizes this issue, one immediately sees the significance of coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God's only way of salvation (John 14:6). He is the only way to being saved; there is no other person or name of a person given in all eternity that will save anyone (Acts 4:10-12). Although this issue will be discussed in great detail in future studies, it is very clear here that a person's entire eternal destiny has nothing to do with what he or she has or has not done; it has completely to do with one's relationship with Jesus Christ (John 3:36).

Man's destiny is directly and eternally linked to Jesus Christ because this is God's only provision of salvation.

QUESTION #8 – Who are the lost?

Although this may seem to be a very basic question, it is imperative that this matter be clearly answered, for until one is personally willing to answer this question individually, he cannot be saved.