

Doctrine of God Part 29- The Spirit's Work of Salvation

In our brief consideration of God as Savior, we must be careful to include the role of the Person of the Holy Spirit. We must never forget that our salvation is a Trinitarian work, involving not only the Father and the Son but also the Holy Spirit. In this chapter, we will learn that He is as essential to our salvation as the Father and the Son.

THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

1. The Spirit conceived the Son. The entire work of atonement was dependent upon Jesus' deity and sinless perfection—two facts that make the virgin birth an absolute necessity. According to Luke 1:34-35, note the role did the Spirit play in the miraculous conception of Jesus...⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"³⁵ The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

2. The Spirit empowered the Son. Although Jesus was God, He walked upon this earth as a real Man, submitting to the will of His Father and totally dependent upon the Spirit's power.

a. *Luke 4:1, 14...Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness...¹⁴ And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.*

b. *Acts 10:38 (see also Matthew 12:28; Luke 5:17)...³⁸ You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*

3. **The Spirit was involved in the offering of the Son.** Note what Hebrews 9:14 teaches about this truth...¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

NOTES: Although it is impossible to understand the full meaning and implications of this text, it is clear that the Holy Spirit in some way aided or empowered the Son in offering Himself on Calvary. Just as the Holy Spirit empowered the Son to live a perfect life and carry out His ministry (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38), so He empowered Him to offer Himself as an atoning sacrifice.

4. **The Spirit raised the Son.** The Son's resurrection from the dead was the work not only of the Father and the Son but also of the Holy Spirit. Note what Romans 8:11 teaches about this truth...¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you

NOTES: In this text, the primary idea communicated is that the Father raised the Son. However, it is certainly implied that the Spirit is the power through whom the Father raised Him.

THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN CONVERSION

The Scriptures teach that man is radically depraved and utterly dependent upon a work of the Holy Spirit. As we will see below, in order for man to be saved, the Spirit must regenerate, convict, reveal, indwell, and seal.

1. **The Spirit regenerates the sinner.** The word "regenerate" comes from the Latin verb *regenerare* [*re* = again + *generare* = to create, beget]. The Bible teaches that man is spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-3); he is thus unresponsive to God's call of salvation. In order for man to respond, the Spirit must first impart spiritual life to him.

a. *John 3:3-6...³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

⁴ Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

NOTES: The phrase "born again" comes from two Greek words: **gennáo** (to beget, bring forth, or engender) and **ánothen** (above or again). During the creation of the universe, the Spirit of God was "moving over the surface of the waters," and He brought forth order and life (Genesis 1:2). This same life-giving work of the Spirit must occur within the sinner before he can hear, appreciate, or respond in obedience to the saving message of the gospel.

b. *Titus 3:4-6...⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior*

NOTES: Two words are used here: regeneration (**paliggenesía: pálin** = again + **genesis** = origin, birth) and renewal (**anakáinosis: ana** = above + **kainós** = new). The importance of the Holy Spirit in the believer's conversion cannot be overemphasized. His initial work in our hearts and minds is the source of our saving response of repentance and faith.

2. The Spirit convicts the sinner of sin. Before the sinner can recognize his need of salvation, he must recognize the gravity of his sin and the judgment that results from it. This is impossible apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. See John 16:7-11... ⁷ But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. ⁸ And He, when He comes, will

convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; ¹¹ and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

NOTES: The word “convict” (v.8) comes from the Greek word *elégcho*, which means, “to expose, convict, or reprove.” It describes the work of a prosecuting attorney who presents arguments and examples to expose the guilt of a criminal. Though this may seem harsh, it is actually a great demonstration of God’s love. Before a man with a deadly disease will seek a cure, he must be convinced of the reality and gravity of his situation. The Spirit convicts the sinner of: (1) his own sin of not believing in Christ; (2) Christ’s righteousness, which was demonstrated when God raised Him from the dead; and (3) coming judgment—the cross of Christ resulted in Satan’s defeat and judgment and is proof that all who follow him will suffer the same fate.

3. The Spirit reveals truth. One of the greatest works of the Spirit is that He reveals the Son to sinful men so that they might be saved.

a. According to I Corinthians 2:10-12, note how are the truths of God revealed to men...¹⁰For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God

NOTES: The Holy Spirit is the Agent who reveals God’s truth to men. However, it is very important to recognize that the Spirit reveals truth to the believer and the unbeliever primarily through the teachings of the Scriptures. He illuminates our minds and enables us to understand what He Himself has written (II Peter 1:20-21).

b. According to John 16:13-14, note the main theme of the Spirit's saving revelation to men...¹³ But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

NOTES: These promises from Jesus are directed primarily to the apostles, through whom the New Testament would be written. However, we also find truths that are applicable to all believers. Any true work or revelation of the Holy Spirit will always glorify the person and atoning work of Christ. The Holy Spirit will not draw attention to Himself.

4. **The Spirit indwells and seals those who believe.** One of the most beautiful and powerful truths regarding the Holy Spirit is that He indwells every true believer in Christ and seals us as redeemed children of God. Through the Spirit, the Father and the Son make their abode in us.

a. *See the following texts regarding the Spirit's indwelling of believers*

(1) John 7:37-39...³⁷ Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

(2) John 14:23...²³ Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.

NOTES: The word "abode" comes from the Greek word *moné*, which denotes a room, dwelling place, or place to live.

NOTES: This text should not be seen as only a warning, but also as a great encouragement. The Holy Spirit indwells every genuine believer, from the most mature Christian to the most recent convert.

b. *Note what Ephesians 1:13-14 teaches about the Spirit's sealing of believers...¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

NOTES: The word “sealed” comes from the Greek verb *sphragízo*, which means, “to stamp with a seal or set a mark upon.” In the Scriptures, the word is used to denote three ideas: (1) ownership or possession (II Corinthians 1:22; Revelation 7:2-3), (2) security (Matthew 27:66; Ephesians 4:30), and (3) authentication and approval (John 3:33; 6:27). The word “pledge” comes from the Greek word *arrabón*, which denotes a deposit, earnest, or advance payment to secure a final purchase (e.g. a down payment with the promise of full recompense). The Holy Spirit who indwells, revives, and empowers the believer is also God's seal of ownership and His guarantee of final and full salvation in His presence! Our God is a saving God—Father, Son, and Spirit! The Father, who designed our salvation and governs its every detail, is God. The Son, upon whose person and work our salvation depends, is God. The Spirit, who indwells us and seals us for the day of redemption, is God (Ephesians 4:30). Each Person of the Trinity involved in our salvation is fully God. Therefore, we can have unwavering confidence that the God who began a good work in us will finish it without fail (Philippians 1:6)

Preservation and the Work of the Holy Spirit (Excerpts)

Ronald Hanko

There are many passages which teach the doctrine of the preservation of saints, or, as it is sometimes called, eternal security. But we believe in the preservation and perseverance of saints not only on the basis of those passages, but also on the basis of

the testimony of all Scripture that salvation is from beginning to end the work of God. In other words, believing in the preservation of saints is an integral part of believing in salvation by grace alone.

The opposite is also true. Those who do not believe this doctrine do not believe it because they attribute something of salvation to man's own works or free-will, not just because of certain passages like Hebrews 6:4-6. Because they make a man's own "decision" or believing the deciding factor in his salvation, they cannot believe that he will surely and infallibly be saved to the end, for what work of man is there that endures? What thought, or motive, or decision does he have that does not change from moment to moment? And how shall he ever be sure that his will to be saved will last, and that what seems to him now the right thing will not look different in the light of another day, or under the pressure of time and circumstances? If his own will is decisive in his salvation, what hope can he ever have of everlasting salvation and security, he whose will is so unstable and changeable that from one moment to the next he is not sure what color shoes he will wear or what he will have for his supper? The foundation of faith in the preservation of saints, and in my own preservation as a child of God, is not any one text of Scripture, therefore, but confidence in God as the only Savior.

The Canons (of Dordt) express this very beautifully in the very first article on the doctrine of preservation or perseverance:

When God calls, according to His purpose, to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, He delivers also from the dominion and slavery of sin in this life; though not altogether from the body of sin, and from the infirmities of the flesh, so long as they continue in the world (V, 1).

That is to say, that because salvation is according to the purpose of God, because it is into the fellowship of the Son of God, and because it is by the powerful work of the Spirit of God, it cannot come to nothing.

To teach a falling away of saints, or even the possibility of it, is to say that God Almighty can be frustrated, the work of the Son of God ineffectual, and the Holy Spirit too weak.

This is exactly the opposite of what the Canons (of Dordt) say in Article 8 of the Fifth Chapter:

Thus it is not in consequence of their own merits, or strength, but of God's free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which, with respect to themselves, is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since His counsel cannot be changed, nor His promise fail, neither can the call according to His purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated (V, 8).

Notice again in this article that all the emphasis is on the fact that salvation is all God's work, and that though man can and always will fail, God cannot and will not. Since the Holy Spirit is the one who actually gives us salvation and the enjoyment of it, His work is of particular interest when we talk about preservation. Receiving salvation and enjoying it involves such things as the new birth, faith, repentance, conversion, sanctification, and entering into glory. To fall away would be to lose one's faith, to turn from repentance, to re-convert to ungodliness, to go back to the old life of sin that preceded our rebirth, to fail to continue in sanctification and never to see the glory that awaits us. The question whether or not this can happen, however, is a question that will be answered according to what one believes about faith, repentance, regeneration, conversion, sanctification and glorification. If one believes, as so many do today, that these are in some way or part the fruit of man's own efforts and free-will, then it is not difficult to believe either that what man has found or gained he can lose again. The whole history of mankind is the history of his losing what he once had. But if one believes that all these things are the free gifts of the Spirit of God, it is impossible to believe that they can ever be lost, for that is to say that the Spirit who gives them to us is too weak to keep on giving them, and to preserve us in the enjoyment of them, and that is blasphemy. It is to say that God is weak.

Believing, then, in the unmistakable testimony of Scripture, that all these things are gifts of the Holy Spirit of God, we believe that salvation once given cannot be lost, not because we are strong, but because the Spirit of God is strong, yea, not only strong, but almighty.

This is all to say that the real issue in the matter of the perseverance or preservation of saints is not whether or not there is such a thing taught in Scripture, but the question, "What is a saint?" Many believe that saints are self-made people. Scripture teaches that saints are those whom the Holy Spirit has made and fashioned, not those who

have made themselves to differ. It is impossible to deny that there are those who fall away from the church and from the fellowship of believers, but they are not Spirit-made saints. They may be called Christians, be counted by us as brethren, be for a time exemplary members of the church, even be leaders and teachers in the church, but should they fall away, they show by that very thing that whatever may have happened to them previously, the Spirit had not worked in them unto salvation.

The thing that has to be emphasized is this: that all of our salvation, regeneration through glorification, is the work of Spirit. No part of it depends in any way on us. No part is a matter of our own choice and "free-will."

Even when we speak of this doctrine as the doctrine of the perseverance of saints, we must remember that it is the Spirit's work. The name "perseverance" emphasizes the calling of all believers to continue steadfastly in the way, not to neglect spiritual exercises, or allow themselves to be seduced by the world and the flesh. That calling is real and necessary, so much so, that those who do not give heed to it will surely fall into great sin. But the reality and urgency of that calling does not change the fact that obedience to it is only by the indwelling and operations of the Spirit. We must persevere if we are to be saved, but it is God the Holy Spirit who works the necessary grace in us.

We must remember this even when talking about the failures of God's people. They are not the work of the Spirit in the sense that the Spirit is to blame for them. But they do take place under the sovereign direction of the Spirit of God, and are even part of His work, in that He uses them for our salvation, causing them to work together with all other things for our good. We acknowledge this when we pray to God through the Spirit; "Lead us not into temptation." It is His withdrawing which makes it possible for us to fall, though this never happens arbitrarily, but always righteously, that is: when we are inclined to go our own way, neglect watching and prayer, and seek the satisfaction of fleshly lusts. It is His withdrawing that leaves us comfortless in our falls. It is His grace that renews us to repentance and restores the assurance of salvation, and that according to the purpose and will of God. In fact, it is only because we believe this, that we can be sure, even in our temptations and falls, that we will never fall away. How else could we sing the beautiful words of Psalm 73; "In doubt and temptation I rest, Lord, in Thee" (Psalter #202, 1). That same confidence, that the Spirit of the Living God rules even in our temptations, is also the one thing which preserves us from despair, when we see our sins and sinfulness, and all our failures and weakness. That He, in the end, will use even those things for good gives peace.

Understand too, that only if what we have said is true, can the Spirit really be called our "Comforter." His comfort is never mere words, but the gift of salvation itself, so precious. But a salvation which is fallible, imperfect, even perishable, is not any comfort at all. We may not put our hope in the things of this world because they are perishable and perishing. How much less in that kind of a salvation? Only a salvation which is "world without end" can be any comfort to those who are perishing, and shall surely perish without it.

The Canons (of Dordt) say that the truth of the preservation of the saints is "an inestimable treasure," "most tenderly loved and constantly defended" by the church of Christ (V, 15). It is that because it is part and parcel of the whole glorious truth of salvation by God's great grace. May God, "against Whom neither counsel nor strength can prevail" dispose us to continue to cherish and defend this truth to the end (Canons V, 15) when finally and forever we shall enjoy without weakness and sin the fruits of His Spirit's great work of preservation.

<http://www.prca.org/resources/publications/articles/item/4630-preservation-and-the-work-of-the-holy-spirit>

Note on the Canons of Dordt...

The Canons of Dordt constitute the judgment of the Synod of Dordt held in the Dutch city of Dordrecht in 1618-1619.

These canons are in actuality a judicial decision on the doctrinal points in dispute from the Arminian controversy of that day. Following the death of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), his followers set forth a Five articles of Remonstrance (published in 1610) formulating their points of departure from the stricter Calvinism of the Belgic Confession. The Canons of Dordt is the judgment of the Synod against this Remonstrance. However, Arminian theology later received official toleration by the State and has since continued in various forms within Protestantism.

The Canons were not intended to be a comprehensive explanation of Reformed doctrine, but only an exposition on the five points of doctrine in dispute. These Canons set forth what is often referred to as the Five Points of Calvinism. Today, the Canons of Dordt form one of the confessional standards of many of the Reformed churches around the world, including the Netherlands, Australia, and North America.

<https://www.theopedia.com/canons-of-dordt>