

060917 For Whom Did Christ Die: For Sinners or Good People? 21/33 September 17, 2006GG
For Whom Did Christ Die: For Sinners or Good People?

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
(Ro 5:7-8)

When you analyze the prevailing contemporary views of salvation in its varied forms (from "easy decisionism" to "lordship salvation," from a simple act of consenting faith to full-blown salvation by works that includes baptism and a lifelong record of faithfulness), a central issue surfaces across all of these views. They challenge the fundamental premise of New Testament teaching that is clearly set forth in this passage.

The prevailing view asserts that Jesus only died for reformed sinners (or reforming sinners), for repenting sinners, or for sinners who decided to "accept" either Jesus or the truth of the gospel as they heard and received it.

It thus adds limits and qualifications to the New Testament doctrine that Jesus died for sinners! It thus attempts to refute and to constrict the New Testament teaching. Further, advocates of these views rather commonly accuse those who embrace the New Testament truth set forth in this passage of being "antinomian" in their teachings, interestingly the precise accusation that Paul's unnamed critics raised against him in [Ro 3:1-8](#). The only limit that the New Testament applies to the death of Jesus is the limit divinely set in Scripture; Jesus died for "...his people" ([Mt 1:21](#)), for his elect or chosen people (specifically asserted in the various passages dealing with factual redemption, a specific price paid for a particular people, a price that in fact purchased those people, not merely made salvation possible for those who choose to comply with the terms and conditions of "neo-nomianism," adding a new law to Scripture by which to constrict the Biblical teaching of Jesus' certain and successful redemption of His particular and chosen people. Commonly people who sense personal vulnerability will react in a highly assertive manner against their potential critics to avoid the spotlight. In this case those who foster these new laws that restrict and compromise Biblical redemption, making them "neo-nomians," will hurl the "antinomian" accusation freely against their potential critics. Name-calling apparently seems safer to them than following Paul and New Testament teaching. If Paul was accused of being antinomian, as he was in [Ro 3:1-8](#), and if Paul rejected that accusation, at the same time carefully rejecting any implication that God caused sin, as he also did in this passage, should those who believe New Testament doctrine not follow his example and avoid both errors in their own beliefs? And if we do not find our own modern critics hurling similar accusations at us, should we not question whether we are teaching the same doctrines that Paul taught by the direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

Interestingly, when Augustus Toplady, the beloved author of "Rock of Ages," was confronting growing Arminianism in his "home" Church of England, he used the following point to confront the skeptical and insecure doctrine that a person could be "saved" today and lose his salvation tomorrow.

Indeed there is nothing in heaven but joy. The peculiar presence of Deity most eminently manifested there, is an endless and ever-increasing source of blessedness, both to the spirits of the just, and to the seraphs that never fell. Where God is possessed; where Christ is seen; where the adorable Trinity pour forth their plenitude of glory unclouded on the delightful, undazzled view; where saints, the children of redemption, are the melodious songsters; and angels, the first fruits of creation, are the enraptured musicians; where the grand employ is praised, and Jehovah himself is the exceeding great reward; surely there the cup of joy must overflow; and only the blest inhabitants themselves can tell how blest

the inhabitants are.

Is there then any thing that can heighten the celestial triumph? That can add to the felicity of those who stand in the divine presence and enhance even their transcendent joy? There is: and we have just heard what it is. It is the regeneration of a fallen soul. It is the renewal of a sinner below. As our Lord expresses it at the 10th verse, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. No sooner is every fresh conversion made known on high than additional joy is there. The memorable day is, if I may so speak, marked as a festival in the calendar of heaven. Beatified saints exult, angels clap their wings, and the whole united choir raise their voices, and strike their golden harps for joy that a soul is born of God and made free for the Jerusalem which is above.

Such exalted hosannas would not resound, on those occasions, among the inhabitants of the skies, if the doctrine of final perseverance was untrue. Tell me, ye seraphs of light; tell me, ye souls of elect men made perfect in glory, why this exuberance of holy rapture at the real recovery of a single sinner to God? Because ye know assuredly that every true conversion is (1.) a certain proof that the person converted is one of your own elect number; and 2.) that he shall be infallibly preserved and brought to that very region of blessedness into which ye yourselves are entered. The contrary belief would silence your harps, and chill your praises. If it be uncertain whether the person who is regenerated to-day may ultimately reign with you in heaven, or take up his eternal abode among apostate spirits in hell; your rejoicings are too sanguine, and your praises are premature. You should suspend your songs until he actually arrives among you: and not give thanks for his conversion until he has persevered unto glorification.⁴⁷

Two points are worth our added consideration in this quote from Toplady. First, Toplady clearly affirms the security of salvation in the death of Christ, something consistently affirmed in his poems and in his prose works that are preserved. Secondly, Toplady uses the term “perseverance” to refer to God’s preserving of His elect so that they cannot finally and eternally fall from their saved state in Christ, not to refer to their abiding faithfulness in good works and faith. “...if the doctrine of final perseverance was untrue,” is clearly explained by Toplady to refer to God’s preserving, not to our abiding in the faith by his subsequent, “...he shall be infallibly preserved and brought to that very region of blessedness into which ye yourselves are entered.” The contemporary interpretation of “perseverance” that focuses on the abiding—and presumably divinely orchestrated—faithfulness of every true elect in faith and manifest godliness fails the historical test of the use of this theological term by respected past theologians such as Toplady. Clearly Toplady viewed this doctrine as the final and certain efficacy of the redemption of Christ to “preserve” the elect so that they cannot lose their salvation and fall finally and eternally away from their standing as children of God and heirs of eternal blessings, not as a guarantee against stumbling or faltering in faith and obedience by a regenerate elect.

Paul’s introduction of this point by the fact that on rare and noble occasions one human may actually give up his/her life to protect or preserve someone whom he/she loves deeply points us in the direction that he intends to go with the spiritual point of this lesson. In the case of Jesus’ death we cannot look to worth, merit, or inherent goodness in the elect as motives for either God’s love or for Jesus’ death. When Jesus died for us, we possessed none of these qualities. We were in every meaningful sense “sinners”! ... *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* I appropriately close this chapter with a few lines from one of my favorite Toplady poems.

The work that his goodness began,

The arm of his strength will complete;

His promise is, Yea and Amen,

And never was forfeited yet:

Things future, nor things that are now,
Not all things below or above
Can make him his purpose forgo,
Or sever my soul from his love
My name from the palms of his hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impress'd on his heart it remains
In marks of indelible grace:
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is giv'n;
More happy but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heav'n.

My Christian friend, your eternal security stands fast with God, not based on your faithfulness, but based on the value of the divine earnest that God has bestowed upon you. It affirms your eternal secure standing in the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus really is the Savior and “friend of sinners”!

Elder Joe Holder