

HOW GOD SAVES SINNERS

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2 April 1976

I. Introduction.

God created man in his own image. Because he did, we are able to observe many of the characteristics of God (though in reduced and sometimes sin-distorted fashion) in the conduct of his creature. For instance, man's greatest undertakings could never succeed without careful planning and logical, step by step procedures. The Lord Jesus criticized the builder who failed to calculate carefully the cost of a tower and his resources, and the king who did not plan his foreign policy wisely (Luke 14:28-32).

Certainly, one of God's greatest undertakings is the salvation of sinful, rebellious men. He has not pursued this project in haphazard fashion. At least three times in the New Testament, we read of the series of events by which God saves an individual. In Rom. 8:29,30; II Thess. 2:13,14; and I Pet. 1:1-5, God explains the careful, logical series of transactions which he conducts with every person whom he brings to salvation.

As we read these lists, we are surprised to find some very obvious (and very strange) omissions. God accomplishes men's salvation through the preaching of the Word of God (I Pet. 1:23, 25; Rom. 10:17; I Cor. 1:21). Yet there is no regular mention of gospel preaching. The sacrificial, atoning death of Christ and his victorious resurrection are absolutely essential to salvation (Gal. 2:21). Yet we find no exposition of them. Why these items are omitted will become clear as we study the lists. For the moment, we need simply note the omission.

The three lists describe the very same series of events, as the chart at the top of the next page shows. But the terminology used differs slightly. And though the events are described in the same order in the three lists, that order is clearest in Rom. 8. Therefore, we will begin by studying Rom. 8 in detail. Once we understand it, the few slight variations in II Thess. and I Peter will be quite clear.

II. Romans 8:29-30.

Paul, in the course of explaining God's provision and care for his own people, referred to them in verse 28 as "the called." "All things work together for good . . . to them who are the called." At this point, it seems, a caution flag went up in the apostle's mind. By "the called," he meant the believers. But some

Rom. 8:29,30	I Pet. 1:1-5	II Thess. 2:13,14
whom he did foreknow	according to the foreknowledge of God the Father	brethren beloved of the Lord
he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren	elect	because God hath from the beginning chosen you
whom he did predestinate, them he also called	through sanctification of the Spirit	through sanctification of the Spirit; he called you by our gospel
[implicit]	unto obedience	and belief of the truth
whom he called, them he also justified	and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ	to salvation
whom he justified, them he also glorified	an inheritance; salvation ready to be revealed in the last time	to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ

of his readers would surely ask, "Are not more than just the believers called by God?" They might even think how the Lord Jesus had contrasted the many who are called with the few who are actually chosen (Matt. 22:14). But Paul was using the term in a special sense. So he paused, in verses 29-30, to explain just what he meant by "the called."

These verses may be likened to a staircase up which God is bringing a group of people to himself. Every person in the group, at one time or another, is on each step of the staircase. There is no suggestion that a person could be on a higher step without having come by way of the lower ones. And everyone whom God places on the lowest step will ultimately reach the top of the staircase. The verses thus present an unbreakable chain of divine activities--activities which culminate in a man's salvation. Let us study the various steps in order.

A. "Whom he did foreknow . . ."

The first step in God's dealings to save a sinner is to foreknow him. It is commonly suggested that this is simply a reference to the omniscience of God--the fact that he knows everything. God in eternity past, so this explanation relates, looked into the future and observed who would receive the Lord Jesus, were they to be given the opportunity. Then, as the rest of verses 29 and 30 go on to explain, he did in fact give them the opportunity. A man's salvation depends upon God's foreknowledge, which, we are told, depends upon that man's openness to the gospel.

This view places man at the start of his own salvation. The first thing God does, foreknowing that a man will be responsive,

may happen before the man's response, in time. But logically, God's foreknowledge and subsequent actions would then depend on something in the man, something out of God's control. This in itself ought to make us cautious about this explanation. But there are three specific reasons which clearly show the view to be wrong.

First, the verse speaks about God's foreknowledge of people, not of facts. To know that a man will believe, given the chance, is quite a different thing from knowing the man. It is one thing for a young man, admiring a young lady from afar, to know facts about her--her name, her preference in flowers, her telephone number. It is quite a different matter for him to come to know her. And it is the latter sort of knowledge, with which the verse is concerned. Paul did not write, "What he did foreknow," but, "Whom he did foreknow."

But let us allow, for the sake of argument, that Paul's language is imprecise at this point. Let us suppose that though he wrote, "Whom," he really meant, "What." In that case, the verse does not specify just what it is that God foreknows about people. It only speaks of his foreknowledge in a general, unrestricted way. Those whom God foreknew will, the verses assure us, ultimately be saved. Is the reference to foreknowledge of facts? Then the verses teach that those about whom God has foreknowledge of any sort will ultimately be saved. But God has foreknowledge about all men. In that case, all men must ultimately be saved.

But perhaps Paul is even more imprecise than we have realized. Perhaps, though he does not say it, he means to restrict God's foreknowledge in this case to foreknowledge of one specific fact. Perhaps what he meant to write was, "Those that God foreknew would trust Christ if given the opportunity, he also did predestinate . . ." Even if we think the apostle is taking such unaccustomed liberty with language, we are not yet out of the woods. For then his teaching directly contradicts the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matt. 11:20-24. There, by exercising his divine omniscience, the Lord scolded the cities which had beheld most of his miracles. He told them that if he had done his miracles in the wicked cities of Tyre, and Sidon, and Sodom, they would have repented and been saved. Here, certainly, is an example of just the sort of knowledge of possibilities ("what a man would do if he were presented with the gospel") of which Paul is supposed to have been speaking. But is Paul teaching that such knowledge on God's part leads inevitably to the salvation of those thus foreknown? Why then did the Lord not perform his miracles in, say, Sodom, so that "it would have remained until this day" (Matt. 11:23)?

If Rom. 8:29 is speaking of God's foreknowledge of facts about people, we must conclude that Paul is careless in his use of language, believes in universal salvation, and disagrees with the Lord Jesus concerning his knowledge about Tyre, Sidon, and

Sodom. Surely this is not the case. Rather, the verse means what it says. The question is not what God foreknew, but whom.

The Scriptures frequently distinguish knowing individuals from knowing facts. One who knows God the Father and God the Son has eternal life (John 17:3), while one who knows true facts about God may be a demon of hell (James 2:19). The Scriptures often speak of the union of a man and a woman in terms of "knowing." Thus in Gen. 4:1, "Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain." Certainly, Adam knew facts about Eve, but this did not produce a son. The knowledge spoken of is an intimate personal relationship.

This, Rom. 8:29 teaches, is how God began the work of salvation. He foreknew a certain group of people. That is, he entered into an intimate personal relationship with them. We might say, he loved them in a special way. In fact, when this same chain of events is described in II Thess., the language of love is used to describe this step in the chain.

In summary, the knowledge with which Rom. 8:29 is concerned is active, not passive, on the part of God. He causes it to take place. It is never the result of man's actions, but rather the cause of them.

B. ". . . He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

It is not always true that the meaning of a word is equal to the sum of the meanings of its parts. But in the case of "predestinate," it works pretty well. A destiny is a goal, an objective, the final end toward which one is striving. To "predestinate" is to fix that goal or destiny ahead of time. Not surprisingly, all six times that the Greek word for "predestinate" is used in the Bible, it is something done by God. Only he can control the end from the beginning.

To some people, predestination suggests the picture of God running roughshod over men, ignoring their desires and rendering their actions futile and meaningless. What will be, will be, it seems, and there is neither motive for obedience to God, nor meaning to rebellion against God. But this is not the biblical picture.

The Greek word here rendered, "predestinate," is translated in Acts 4:28, "determined before." There, the early Christians recall in prayer that all the human opposition heaped against the Lord Jesus during his earthly life (4:26,27) simply fulfilled God's eternal purposes (4:28). That is, God accomplishes his eternal purposes through, not in spite of, man's actions and desires. Nor do moral questions become meaningless in the face of his all-embracing sovereignty. Though Christ was "delivered by the

determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," the hands that crucified and slew him were "wicked hands" (Acts 2:23).

Predestination, then, describes God reaching a goal through means--means that may include very human factors. In Rom. 8:29, the goal is the conformity of a person whom he has foreknown to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has fixed the destiny beforehand. There is no question that it will come to pass. But along with the goal, he has ordained means that are equally certain. The foreknown individual must be saved before he can become like Christ, and that requires the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:14,15). Once he is saved, the correction of the Scriptures (II Tim. 3:16,17) and daily disciplined living (I John 3:2,3, cf. II Cor. 3:18) are necessary means for bringing him to the likeness of Christ.

C. "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called"

Now Paul arrives at the term which, we suggested above, made the discussion of Rom. 8:29-30 necessary in the first place. Some might understand the gospel "call" to refer to the general preaching of the gospel, and might interpret the Lord Jesus' words in Matt. 22:14 in this way. But the apostle would have us be perfectly clear that there is another sort of "call," one that lacks the optional "come if you can and leave when you must" character of an informal invitation. By placing the "call" in this sequence of divine saving actions, Paul shows that it is not an invitation, but an imperative; not optional, but obligatory; not given to all men, but restricted to those who actually will be saved. Who are the called? They are the members of that group with whom God has entered into the intimate relationship known as "foreknowledge," and whose destiny he has inescapably fixed as conformity with his Son. Therefore, the outcome of this call is certain. All those who are called will be justified and glorified. Man's response to the call is not included in this list, though it is in II Thess. and I Pet. But it need not be mentioned explicitly. The series of events described in theverses makes it clear that those called, respond.

The concepts which Paul is expounding are no different from those which the Lord Jesus taught. In John 6:44,37, the Lord himself outlines the very same picture of a "call" which is limited to those who will receive it, and which therefore is always received. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him," the Lord taught (John 6:44). The call, or drawing, is essential to salvation. None can be saved without it. But it is not only necessary, it is sufficient. It always results in salvation. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37, cf. 39).

D. "Whom he called, them he also justified"

Justification, like foreknowledge, is widely misunderstood. The form of the word suggests a transparent meaning. The suffix "-ify" means to cause something to have a certain quality. "Clarify" means to make something clear. "Vilify" means to make someone appear vile, or evil. "Qualify" means to meet certain standards of quality. Certainly, then, "justify" means to make someone just, or righteous. How does God do this? Some suggest that he enables a seeking sinner, by the Holy Spirit, to live a better and better life. The believer steadily gets rid of sins and does more and more right things, until eventually he becomes "just"--righteous--and deserves a place in heaven. If he reaches this state in this life, he may enter heaven when he dies. What if he is on the right road, but has not been "justified" enough by the time of death to enter heaven? He may be granted an intermediate state in which the remaining sins may be purged. This entire process, its advocates are quick to point out, is possible only by God's grace. The person involved is trusting God to bring about these improvements in his life. Thus it is, so they claim, a biblical notion of salvation by grace through faith.

Such a concept certainly does fit the idea of "cause to be just" which the division of "justify" into its component parts suggests. But we have already noted that such a procedure to find the meaning of a word is precarious. A strawberry is not a fruit made of hay, nor is a mushroom what happens to a dirt floor when the roof leaks. The only reliable guide to the meaning of a word is its usage. What does the word mean in other places where it is used? That will guide us to its meaning in places where there is a question. We did get a good notion of "predestination" from breaking the word down. But we relied on the usage of the word in Acts 4:28 to give substance to our understanding. So with justification, we must consult other occurrences of the word within the Bible.

When we do, such passages as Deut. 25:1 come to light. Moses describes a lawcourt, in which two men with a grievance appear before the judges. Moses instructs the judges, in such a case, to "justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked." By "condemn the wicked," he is not telling the judges to teach the guilty man how to do more and more evil. No, he is simply telling them to make an official statement that the wicked man is wicked. Similarly, by the instruction to "justify the righteous," we do not understand him to be setting up a moral improvement program for the victor in the court case. The meaning is simply, "declare him righteous."

Similarly, in Luke 16:15 the Lord described the Pharisees as "they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts." They declared themselves, by word and by showy action, to be righteous. Actually, they were hypocrites, white-washed tombs, "which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27).

Thus, according to its usage, "justify" does not mean "to make righteous in fact." Rather, it is a legal word, meaning, "to declare to be righteous." And it is thus that God justifies a sinner. He declared his sinless Son to be guilty on the cross in our place. And though he had never done a single sin, that judicial declaration made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us (II Cor. 5:21). In just the same way, a man may never have done a single righteous act in his entire life. But when he receives the Lord Jesus Christ, God justifies him--declares him righteous. And that declaration makes the sinner righteous in God's eyes (II Cor. 5:21b). It conveys to him a righteousness that he could never earn himself, "the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:9, cf. Rom. 4:5). God does proceed to change the life of the believer from a life of practical sin to one of practical righteousness. But it is the judicially imputed righteousness of Christ, not the practical righteousness of the believer, that wins him entrance to heaven.

E. "Whom he justified, them he also glorified"

The believer in the present life will never be totally free from the grip of sin (I John 1:8,10). He cannot be. The body in which he dwells, inherited from Adam, is still tainted by Adam's sin. As much as "I delight in the law of God after the inward man," "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:22,23). The answer to this dilemma is one of the major burdens of Rom. 8 in its entirety. The day will come, we are assured, when "the sufferings of this present time," as the believer struggles daily between the desires of the Spirit and of the flesh, will be replaced with "the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Rom. 8:18-25 tells how sin has pervaded the universe, and how the universe will be delivered when God's children (verses 16-17) are fully manifested as his sons (verse 19). The momentous event that will do away with our dilemma is described as "the redemption of the body" (verse 23). When the Lord Jesus returns from heaven, he "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:20). Then the goal to which God predestined his foreknown ones will have been accomplished, and God's carefully planned work of salvation will be completed.

III. I Pet. 1:1-5.

Any careful reader of Peter's two epistles is impressed with the wealth of parallels between them and the writings of Paul. Peter himself acknowledges some similarities, and speaks of the esteem in which he holds Paul's writings (II Pet. 3:15, 16). It is not surprising, then, that he should outline in his

first epistle, by way of greeting, the same chain of divine saving activities which Paul had expounded before him in Rom. 8 and (as we shall see) II Thess. 2.

A. ". . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father"

Peter begins (1:2) by terming his readers "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." This makes clear the order of the two events, foreknowledge and election. When a builder erects a house according to a blueprint, the blueprint must exist first, before the building process begins. So here, as in Rom. 8, God's foreknowledge is the first step in the salvation of a sinner.

B. "Elect . . ."

In Romans 8, foreknowledge led to predestination. In I Peter, it leads to election. Both terms refer to God's choice of some individuals to be saved. But they view that choice from different aspects. Predestination emphasizes the result or goal for which God chooses men. Election emphasizes that it is a selection, a separation of those who will eventually be saved from the rest of the human race.

The New Testament frequently views this selection as the compilation of a roll book. Luke 10:20 and Phil. 4:3 mention this "book of life," which was finished, according to Rev. 17:8, by the time of the foundation of the world. Its decrees are thus irrevocable. Rev. 3:5, sometimes quoted in opposition to this view, simply promises that the names of those who persevere in the faith will remain in the book of life. It does not tell what happens to those who do not overcome. (One may ask whether their names were ever written there in the first place!) Similarly, Rev. 22:19, which refers in the King James Version to one's part being taken away out of the book of life, has no Greek manuscript support, but is an insertion from the Latin Vulgate. The Old Testament, by the way, does not know of the book of life. Contrast the scenes of the last judgment in Dan. 7:10 and Rev. 20:12. It does know of a book of the living (Ps. 69:28), a census-roll of those alive on earth at any given time, from which an evildoer may be removed by death (cf. Deut. 9:14). Exod. 32:32-33 refers to this book of the living (cf. 32:10), and not to the book of life, the book of election.

The notion that God selects some individuals for salvation, thereby irrevocably abandoning others to hell, seems to some people unfair in the extreme. Paul elaborately expounds some of God's reasons for making such a choice in Rom. 9. At this point, we will not study that passage in detail. The very act of questioning God's fairness reveals the sinfulness and rebellious-

ness of man's heart. The God of the Bible sets himself in stark contrast with idols. They are made by men, according to man's standards, man's desires, and man's morals (Rom. 1:23,25). The God of the Bible is the great "I am" (Exod. 3:14), the self-existent one. He does not depend on man's acknowledgment to exist, and his attributes are not varied by man's whim (Rom. 3:3,4). It is, in short, irrelevant to the truth of the doctrine of election whether some people think it makes God "unfair," or whether they protest that they "could not believe in a god like that." The doctrine does not place God on trial. But it may force us to evaluate our standards of fairness. And it may warn us that if our belief in God depends on whether we like his characteristics or not, we are believing in a god of our own making, and not in the only wise God our Savior.

C. ". . . through sanctification of the Spirit . . ."

From election, Peter traces God's saving activity "through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience" When one travels from one town to another through a tunnel, the tunnel lies between the two towns. So here, Peter's language depicts an order in these events. Just as election was preceded by foreknowledge, so it is followed by sanctification of the Spirit, and subsequently by some other things.

"Sanctification" is a general term that means, "set apart." In John 17:19, it describes the Lord's single-mindedness in going to the cross. In the life of the believer, it has both an immediate and a continual reference. Immediately, it is something that is true of every Christian, that happens to him in connection with his salvation. Thus every believer may be called a "saint," a sanctified one (I Cor. 1:2; 6:11). Continually, it is a process of daily purification of life by the Word of God (John 17:17; Eph. 5:26). God sanctified the believer immediately at the time of salvation, by setting him apart from the world. Then, throughout his life on earth, God continues to sanctify him by separating the world from him, in cleansing and purifying his personal life. There is a striking parallel to these two aspects of sanctification in the motives which the book of Leviticus gives the children of Israel for obeying its commandments. Twice it refers to God's immediate activity in the past. "I am the Lord your God, who hath separated you from the peoples" (Lev. 20:24,26). But the present, continual work of sanctification is also mentioned. "I am the Lord who sanctifieth you" (20:8; 21:8,15,23; 22:9,16,32).

Peter describes a man's belief and justification, as we will see, in the phrase, "obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." "Sanctification of the Spirit," which leads to belief, cannot describe the continual sanctification which elsewhere in Scripture follows it. Rather, Peter is describing the immediate sanctification, the sort that is connected with the event of salvation. This "sanctification" is a work of the Holy

Spirit which marks the elect individual as distinct from the rest of humanity, and which leads to his belief and salvation.

It is not hard to see the connection between the "sanctification of the Spirit" and the call of which Paul writes in Rom. 8. Unsaved men who are foreknown and elect do not seem, either to themselves or to others, to be any different from those who are not foreknown and elect. In fact, before God's Spirit began working in their hearts, they were to all appearances just as un-foreknown and non-elect as the rest (Eph. 2:2,3). Then there came the day when God supernaturally removed the spiritual blindness from their eyes (II Cor. 4:3-6) and summoned them to faith in Christ. They found themselves listening to a message that they and their friends had scorned before. They became disgusted with sins that before had been the chief pursuits of their company. They worshipped as their Lord and their God the One who had hitherto been only the object of blasphemy in their conversations. What Paul termed the call, what the Lord described as a drawing, Peter styles a setting apart. Of all the saving activities described in this chain, this is the first in an elect man's experience which marks him as distinct from the non-elect.

D. ". . . unto obedience . . ."

The only response possible to the sanctification of the Spirit is faith in Christ. The New Testament frequently uses words like "command" and "obey" to describe faith (Acts 6:7; 17:30; Heb. 5:9). Perhaps this idiom stems from the Lord's description of belief as a work (John 6:28,29). Such a description conflicts with the notion of salvation apart from works (Titus 3:5) only if we conceive of faith as something generated by the believer himself. But the New Testament views it as something of which the Lord Jesus is the author (Heb. 12:2). Faith is Spirit-enabled obedience to the Spirit-given call.

This is the only link in the chain of divine saving actions which has no parallel in Rom. 8:29,30. Why does Paul omit it? Certainly, he does not mean to intimate that it is unnecessary. The Lord Jesus clearly taught, "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Rather, the tight logical chain into which Paul joined the various saving events shows that the belief is inevitable. One who is foreknown, elect, and sanctified by the Spirit's call will, without fail, believe. And, apart from these preparatory events, there can be no saving faith. To emphasize the effective nature of the call, according to his purpose for including verses 29 and 30 in Rom. 8 in the first place, Paul moved directly from the call to justification. Peter simply lists explicitly what for Paul was inevitable and understood.

E. ". . . and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"

Corresponding to the "justification" of Rom. 8:30, Peter speaks of the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Again, he and Paul are looking at different sides of the same coin. One who would live in fellowship with God must not only have his sins forgiven, but also be positively righteous. Sprinkling is a ritual of cleansing from sin. It was practiced in the Old Testament as a picture of the cleansing which Christ accomplished by shedding his blood (Heb. 9:13,14,19-22; 10:19-22; 12:24). Justification, on the other hand, depicts the believer clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, declared (in spite of his own life) not just innocent, but righteous.

F. ". . . to an inheritance . . . , unto salvation . . ."

Peter, like Paul, saw more to the Christian experience than forgiveness of sin in the present life. In the context of Rom. 7, Paul's attention was more particularly focused on the glorification of the Christian, when the discrepancy between position and practice would be eliminated through the replacement of the body of humiliation with the body made like unto the Lord Jesus'. Peter unquestionably has the redemption of the body in view. For he tells his readers, already "saved" as far as forgiveness of sins is concerned (1:2), that they are awaiting a "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (verse 5). But they will receive more than just new bodies. The joys and riches which await them in heaven are an inheritance of value and permanence far beyond earth's greatest wealth (1:4).

IV. II Thess. 2:13,14.

Paul's description of the conditions during the tribulation period in II Thess. 2 leads him to a description of the hopeless delusion of those who will refuse, in that time of judgment, to take refuge in the Lord Jesus (2:10-12). From such a gloomy subject, Paul's mind quickly turns to consider the wonderful testimony of the Thessalonian Christians (compare I Thess. 1:6-10). Yet they are not to be praised for their outstanding testimony. God alone receives thanks for them (I Thess. 1:2; II Thess. 1:3), for he is the One who has saved them. In II Thess. 2:13,14, Paul outlines once more the steps by which God accomplished that end.

A. "brethren beloved of the Lord"

Paul begins the chain by calling them, "beloved." This is by far the less common of two Greek words translated "beloved" in the New Testament. The more common word is simply a passive adjective, and describes one who is at that moment the recipient of love. But this word is a verb, a passive participle in the perfect tense. The perfect tense refers to an action in the past

which has continuing results in the present. Thus, this less common term for "beloved" means more than "one who is now loved by the Lord." It includes the deeper notion, "one who has been loved of the Lord in the past, and whose present condition is affected by that past act of love."

Thus this verse, which goes on to describe how God has brought them to himself, begins with a past act of God's love. We are at the same link in the chain described in Rom. 8:29 and I Pet. 1:2 by foreknowledge--that intimate personal relationship into which God entered with certain people long ago. Those who are finally saved, begin by being the undeserving recipients of God's love. And those whom God loves (or foreknows), he inevitably brings to salvation.

Of course, not all men will be saved. The immediately preceding verses in II Thess. describe those who will "perish" and "be damned." If Paul contrasts them with those who are "beloved of the Lord," and if he elsewhere indicates (Rom. 8:29,30) that all the beloved (or foreknown) will be saved, we must conclude that there are some whom God did not love.

This is how the apostle Paul understood Mal. 1:2,3. He quoted the verses in Rom. 9:13. "As it is written, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.'" His reason for quoting it was to explain "the purpose of God according to election" (Rom. 9:11). Why did God prophesy Jacob's rule over Esau before the children were born, before they had done anything either to deserve or to forfeit God's blessing? God's selection was made, not on the basis of works, but of his own sovereign love.

It ought not amaze us that God sets his love only on a few of the human race. What ought to amaze us is that he sets it on any. We all deserve the hatred which the non-elect receive. "The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth" (Ps. 11:5). "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man" (Ps. 5:4-6). The marvel is that those upon whom God set his love were sinners, members of a satanic system dedicated to rebellion against the Creator and Lord of the universe.

This, it seems, is the burden of John 3:16. "World," in John's writings, does not mean "everybody." It is the title of a system, headed by Satan (John 14:30; 16:11), and made up of fallen, natural men. A good synonym for "world" is "sinners." It is not hard to see how unsuitable "everybody" is as a meaning for world, and how suitable "sinners" is. In I John

2:17, it is not "everybody" who is passing away, for that would contradict the end of the verse, "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." But most certainly, sinners and their lusts will pass away. In John 8:23, Christ, the perfect man among men, could not say that he was not included in "everybody." "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). But he could say that he was not part of the sinful system. When the Lord tells the disciples in John 15:19 that they are no longer part of the world, for he has chosen them out of it, his words are nonsense, if "world" means "everybody." Certainly he is not teaching them that by saving them he has caused them no longer to exist! But he is saying that he has taken them from among sinners and transformed them into new creatures with no part in that sinful system. Perhaps the strongest indication that "world" is not a title of totality is I John 2:2 and 5:19. When John does wish to indicate totality, in reference to the sinful system, he uses the phrase, "whole world." This does not mean "the whole everybody," but "all of those who are in the world system." Thus John 3:16 does not teach that God loves everybody. Such an interpretation would flatly contradict Mal. 1:3, Ps. 5:4-5; 11:5. Rather, it teaches that those upon whom God set his love were in the world, sinners, in rebellion against him. Paul may even have had John 3:16 in mind when he wrote Rom. 5:8. The same thought is expressed in both. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

B. "God hath from the beginning chosen you . . ."

Here is the predestination of Rom. 8, the election of I Pet. 1.

C. ". . . through sanctification of the Spirit . . ."

As in I Pet., the road from election to salvation lies through the sanctification of the Spirit. Thus here again a clear order of events is presented.

2:14 amplifies the sanctification of the Spirit with the words, "whereunto he called you by our gospel." God does the calling. He uses the preaching of the Word, empowered by the Spirit, to set men apart for himself.

D. ". . . and [through] belief of the truth . . ."

The term omitted in Rom. 8, and supplied as "obedience" in I Pet., is now described in the more common language of belief. Note that although sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth are here joined together as the route from election to salvation, their relative order is clear from I Pet. 1. There,

obedience clearly follows sanctification ("elect . . . through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience . . .").

E. ". . . to salvation . . ."

The end for which God has chosen them, and to which he brings them by sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, is salvation. This general term includes both the deliverance from sin expressed in "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:2), and the positive righteousness granted through "justification" (Rom. 8:30).

F. ". . . to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"

The final outcome, complete conformity to the Lord Jesus, is once again the capstone of the entire process.

V. Summary.

A. How are these passages related?

At this point, the chart on page 2 will provide a helpful summary of the discussion. The same series of saving actions is presented in the same order in all three passages.

B. Why are some things left out?

At the outset, we noted that there is no discussion in these lists of the death of Christ (though there is mention of the application of his blood, in I Pet.). There is no consistent reference to the preaching of the gospel (though there is to how God uses that preaching, in II Thess.). Yet the items that are mentioned, are regularly repeated in all three lists.

There seems to be a pattern to what is included and what is excluded. God has done some things in providing salvation which are available to all men. The gospel is to be preached to all men, not just to the elect (Mark 16:15). The death of Christ could save all men, and though it does not, yet it does gain them certain benefits (I John 2:2; cf. I Cor. 15:22). These general or common provisions for salvation are not included in the lists which we have studied, except as they are efficaciously applied to the elect. The items which are included are those which God has done only for those who will be saved. His special love, his elective predestination, the irresistible call of his Spirit, the gift of faith, the forgiveness of sin and the gift of Christ's imputed

righteousness, the promise of glorification--none of these is ever experienced by someone who will not experience them all. They are the particular or limited elements in salvation--limited to those who actually will be saved.

C. So What?

Modern evangelical preaching considers many of the points which we have discussed as secondary to the gospel. In an effort to avoid disagreements and make the gospel as appealing as possible, some of these doctrines have been glossed over or even denied. But can we consider as secondary a pattern which God repeats three times over in his Word? This, and this alone, is the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9).

This doctrine, properly understood, will not stifle our interest in evangelism. Quite the contrary, the Spirit of God, by laying bare the series of events by which God saves sinners, shows that God uses means to accomplish his sovereign ends. It is not true that God will save the elect, whether or not we witness to them. What is true is that he will save the elect, and will use faithful witnesses to that end. Indeed, we will witness more eagerly when we realize that the effectiveness of our work does not depend on the fancy of the wilful sinners to whom we witness, but on the sovereign God who has promised to honor his Word (cf. Isa. 55:10-11).

Once we understand how completely salvation is a gift of God, and how powerless we are to provide any element of it ourselves, we will have a new perspective of our relationship to God. Questions which often arise concerning the permanence of salvation will no longer disturb us. Nor need we fear that the knowledge of our security in Christ will lead to lack of discipline in the Christian life. Quite the contrary, it is from his exposition of this series of God's saving acts that the apostle Paul goes on to exhort, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or by our epistle" (II Thess. 2:15).