

The Glory of God in Salvation

By Steve Pruitt

It was in October of 1975 when I was 16 years old that I first remember kneeling at the altar to ask Jesus Christ to be my Lord and Savior. I didn't feel particularly convicted or remorseful of my sin. Our family had attended church all my life so up until that point I was a pretty good kid morally. It could be that at some point earlier in my life I had asked Jesus to save me, but I remember at 16 thinking, "I should really make sure that this is a done deal." Besides, there were some other kids in our youth group who were making that decision and if they were going to heaven I wanted to go with them.

Everyone in our family attended church. All of my aunts, uncles and cousins and grandparents. I suppose I thought it was just what you did no questions asked. To some degree I may have even felt like that I was born a Christian.

As the day drew near for me to be baptized and officially join the church, one afternoon my dad stopped me in our dining room and asked me if I understood what I was doing. I assured him that I did. At this he responded, "There are a lot of people who have their names on the church role who will die and go to hell." To my recollection this was one of the few spiritual things my dad ever said to me. Though we regularly attended church we rarely if ever discussed spiritual matters. However, this message was loud and clear; church membership and baptism will not save you, son.

The problem I had could not be solved with outward ritual or ceremony. There was nothing I could do make myself good enough to become a Christian or to live out the Christian life. My problem was inward; in the heart. I was born with a bad heart and I could not fix it. There was no chance that my life would ever hit the mark in which it was intended which is to give glory to God.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23) The glory of God is the benchmark, the standard for the human life. The glory of God is the purpose for human existence, but we are helpless in our natural state to fulfill that purpose. In the beginning God created man to display his glory.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV)

After making Adam and Eve in his image, God gave them some commands after he created them; to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and have dominion. The Hebrew Bible translates Genesis 1:27 like this: *And the Great Powerful One filled the man with a representation of himself.* So when God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply and have dominion he was telling them to fill the earth with a representation of himself. They were to be image bearers. They were to fill the earth with the likeness or the glory of God. However, Adam and Eve did not fully carry out the mandate God gave them because they sinned. Once they sinned they could no longer give a proper representation of God.

Not only did Adam and Eve sin, but they passed down that sin nature to the rest of mankind. Man's sin nature is inherent. Romans 5:12 says, *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned . . .*

(ESV) In Adam we all sinned. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they were by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3 ESV).

Paul, quoting King David, told the Romans, . . . *as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.* (Romans 3:10-12, Psalm 14:1-3 ESV) King David also wrote, *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.* (Psalm 51:5 ESV) In another psalm David wrote, *I say to the Lord, You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you* (Psalm 16:2 ESV).

Isaiah, in the midst of his prophetic word concerning the Messiah, said, *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way. . .* (Isaiah 53:6 ESV) Isaiah also lamented, *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.* (Isaiah 64:6 ESV)

Have you ever pictured in your mind what the polluted garments (filthy rags in the King James Version) looked like to which Isaiah referred? When I thought about it I first pictured an auto mechanic's shop towels; stained with grease and oil from days or months of use. I even pictured the towels of a hospital laundry room. However, my best guess is that Isaiah was alluding to the rags of a leper; cankered with puss, blood and rotten flesh. That is what our righteousness looks like. We fall horribly short of the glory of God. Falling short of God's glory is the essence of sin.

Man in his fallen state is so short of God's glory that he is not even capable of making a righteous decision. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.* (1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV).

I read a quote one time by William Temple who said, "The only thing of our very own which we contribute to our salvation is the sin which makes it necessary." Before salvation we are dead in our trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1). There is nothing in man that is worth saving. God himself said that the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth (Genesis 8:21 ESV). Man is totally bankrupt, lost. Man has no hope and without God in this world (Ephesians 2:12). We all deserve hell and God would be totally just to leave us in our sin to receive our just condemnation. God does not owe it to man to save him.

We will never understand the glory of God's grace in salvation nor will we ever understand the love of God unless we understand how totally depraved the human soul is. But, as depraved as the human soul is God chooses to save some in order to demonstrate the glories of his grace. And others are left in their sin. Please understand that God sends no one to hell. Man's sin sends him to hell. God neither tempts nor makes man sin; man is born with a bent toward sin and left to himself he will always sin. Man sins when he is drawn away by his own lusts and enticed (James 1:13-15). Man sins because he wants to; he likes it. Left to himself man will always fall short of the glory of God.

But God had and now has a solution for man's falling short. He sent his son, Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10) Not only is our soul totally lost, but we have lost our ability to fulfill the purpose for which we were created; to be the representation of God's glory. Jesus came as the perfect, sinless glory of God (2 Corinthians 5:21, John 1:14) to restore man to his original created purpose; to give God glory. He did what the first Adam could not do because of sin. Jesus fully displayed the glory of God and by his death and resurrection he became the hope by which we too can bear the glory of God. That was God's plan before the beginning of time.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:3-6 (ESV)

In Ephesians 1:3-6 the Apostle Paul described two acts that God performed which resulted in the praise of his glorious grace. The acts to which Paul refers is that God, in his love, "chose us in him...that we should be holy and blameless before him" and "predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ." God's desire for us to be holy and blameless is for us to be representatives of his glorious attributes; his holiness and infinite beauties. His desire to adopt us as sons is so that we can be in his family; like Father, like son. The goal is the praise of his glory.

He chose and predestined us to show the glories of his grace and love and did so before the foundation of the world. His choice had no dependence upon our future choice to receive his adoption. God did not choose and predestine us based on our merits or because he looked into the future and saw that one day we would receive his choosing. In fact, had God not chosen and predestined us we neither would not nor could not have chosen him.

God did not look into the future and say, "Because they will one day love me I am going to love them." It was God first loving us that gave us any hope of ever loving him (Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10 ESV). There was nothing in us that was lovable. That is what makes his love for us so incredible and his grace so glorious. God chose to love us for love's sake and his own glory.

The glory of God's grace is manifested in his predestination of us as sons because we were not capable of saving ourselves. God's election, choosing and predestining of us is totally based on his love for us. There is nothing we could have done to ever have been worthy of his love. If God's choosing of us was based on our eventual choice to choose him we would have reason to boast. However, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV)

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, *God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.* (1Corinthians 1:28-31 ESV)

Paul wrote to Titus, *...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* (Titus 3:5-7 ESV) We will not be able to stand before God one day and say, "God, had I not chosen you I would not be in heaven." To which God might reply as Jesus did to his disciples, "You did not choose me, I chose you."

Jesus said, *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* He later said, *... no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.* (John 6:44, 65 ESV) Jesus also said, *All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.* (Matthew 11:27 ESV)

It was God who chose to reveal himself to us and have mercy on us. We did not choose his mercy; we couldn't have. Romans 9:15-16 says, *For he [God] says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*

John wrote, *He (Jesus) came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* (John 1:11-13 ESV) Peter wrote, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...* (1 Peter 1:3 ESV) We were not capable of believing, he caused it to be so.

Paul went on to tell the Ephesians, *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.* (Ephesians 1:11-12 ESV) The Greek word Paul used for predestined is *proorizo* which means to limit in advance, predetermine, determine before, ordain or predestinate. God limited in advance, he predetermined ahead of time those who would believe. That is a humbling thought and cause for thanksgiving and praise not arrogance or boasting.

Paul also used the same Greek word in Romans 8:29 where he wrote, *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* (ESV)

Many people have interpreted Romans 8:29 as saying that God, in his omniscience, looked down through time and saw the people who would one day accept his call on their lives then chose and predestined those people to salvation based on the choice he knew they would one day make. There are at least four reasons why this interpretation is faulty. First, certainly God is all-knowing, but the verse says that God foreknew people not certain facts about people. He foreknew the people with which he would have a relationship; adopt into his family. Secondly, the scripture does not say God foreknew or foresaw that a certain group of people would believe and then predestined them according to that knowledge.

Third, we just read in Romans 3 where Paul wrote that there is none who seeks after God. If there are none who seek after God then God could not have looked down through time and saw that one day a certain group of people would seek him.

The epitome of arrogance is the belief that I somehow determined my salvation. But the humbling part of God choosing to save me is that I didn't deserve it and I never would have believed had he not chosen me. If I believe that I was saved by any other reason than God's choice I have fallen from grace. That doesn't mean I have lost my salvation like many have preached over the years. It means that I have not understood that there was nothing I could do to save me and only according to God's sovereignty and purpose did he choose to adopt me into his family.

John Piper once said, "If God watches (even ahead of time in eternity with his foreknowledge) and waits, as it were, for us to act, and then in response to that self-generated act, he chooses us, then we are not "chosen by divine grace"; we are chosen by a decisive human act. God would simply be a responder. We would determine his action. And grace would no longer be grace."

The fourth reason why God didn't choose us based on our choice, is found in Romans 8:30. *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* (ESV) Paul did not say that those whom God called he gave the option of self determination. Rather, those whom God called he also justified. God justifies all whom he calls; there are no exceptions. God's grace is irresistible.

This truth is supported in Acts 13:48 which reads, *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.* (ESV) Luke did not write that those who believed were then appointed to eternal life, their appointment to eternal life was preceded by their believing. Had they not been appointed to eternal life they would not have believed. Though it is true that not everyone who hears the call of man to believe in Christ unto salvation will believe, all those who hear the call of God will believe and be justified.

When being questioned by the Jews on whether or not he was the Christ, Jesus replied, *I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.* (John 10:25-26 ESV). Notice that Jesus did not say, "but you do not believe "therefore" you are not part of my flock." He made it plain that being a part of the flock was a prerequisite to believing. In other words, if those Jews had been a part of Jesus' flock they would have believed. Only those who are chosen by God will believe. They are the elect.

You might say, "Wait a minute. John 3:16 says that whosoever believes will be saved. So, if I had to believe to be saved. I did do something to bring about my salvation." To that I say, "Yes, you had to believe. However, if God had not caused you to believe you never would have because you were not capable of believing." The "whosoever" in John 3:16 are those whom God chooses. The elect will believe. Blaise Pascal wrote, "No man ever believes with a true and saving faith unless God inclines his heart; and no man when God does incline his heart can refrain from believing."

Someone might argue "Why preach the gospel if God has already chosen those whom he will save?" The first answer to that question is that God commands us to preach the gospel (Matthew 28:19). The second answer is that the preaching of the gospel is the means by which God has ordained to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). The third answer is that whether you believe in God's sovereign choice of the elect or you believe that God looked through the tunnels of time and based his choice on knowing who would choose him, you end up in the same place.

If God knew before the foundation of the world that in October of 1975 Steve Pruitt would walk down to an altar at Skirum United Methodist Church and ask forgiveness for his sins, then it was going to happen. I can either believe that God predetermined it or it happened by blind physical fate. Those are my only choices. That which is foreknown is predetermined. If God foreknew it would happen it was going to happen. There were no other possibilities. So, why preach the gospel? Either way you believe gets you to the same place the only difference is who gets the glory.

If God just responded to the choice he knew I would make then I get the glory. God can pat me on the back and say, "Good job, Steve. You figured it out. You are smarter than a lot of other people. There was just something good enough in you that helped you make the right decision." However, if God chose me in his sovereignty out of love knowing I would never have chosen him because of the total depravity of my soul; he gets the glory. That is exactly what God does for his elect to the praise of his glory and his glorious grace.

Peter wrote, *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* (1 Peter 2:9 ESV)

We represent the praise of his glorious grace by proclaiming his excellencies. His excellencies are his glory; it is who he is and what he is about. We give praise to his grace simply by being chosen by him. However, the praise of his grace is reflected in our lives as we give verbal testament of his saving grace and as our conduct and character reflect his divine influence; the conformity of our lives into his image. And he has predestined that we should be conformed to the image of his Son, who, by the way, was the exact image of the Father.

Undoubtedly someone will ask, "Well, what if I am not elect?" Voddie Baucham would say, "Not your department. God doesn't sit up in heaven and say, "Watch this. I'm going to make this person want me then not save him." Your job is to repent and believe. Then work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Jesus said that whoever comes to him he will in no way cast out (John 3:37). Ask yourself: Have I repented? Have I believed? Am I living proof of God's glorious grace? Am I living for the glory of God?