

OF GOD'S PURPOSE OF GRACE
By Ron Harvey

TEXT: I Timothy 1:9

Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

I Timothy 1:9

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, begin predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

Ephesians 1:11

INTRODUCTION

Note first from our text that God has saved us according to his own purpose.

Now some people think that God saves according to works. This is the common perception of the masses – that man must do something to be saved. But the Bible everywhere says, “not of works lest any man should boast.”

And others think that God saves us if we reform ourselves so that there is some inherent goodness in us. And if you ask people on the street why they are going to heaven, many will say, “Because I am pretty good.” But the Bible says, “There is none good, no not one.”

And some think God saves according to birthright. The Jews said, “We have Abraham as our father.” And by this, they meant that they were accepted by God because they were Jews.

Some think they are saved because they are born into a Christian family. And some churches encourage this thinking by baptizing babies as though they are saved by God's covenant with the parents.

But our text says he saved us, “according to his own purpose.”

Now when it says that God saves according to his own purpose, this would suggest that God does not save arbitrarily. If we know anything about God from the Scriptures, we know that he is not an arbitrary God. He doesn't just take every other person or every third person born and save them. This would be purely arbitrary. But, God is a thinking, planning God and when he does something it is according to purpose and there is no arbitrariness about it. Everything he does is by design.

So, God doesn't save arbitrarily.

And God doesn't save according to chance. He doesn't wind up the world, take his hands off, and merely let things happen. This is Deism. And he doesn't let redemption happen by chance either. If we are saved it is not because of good fortune. It is not due to a fortuitous turn of events here and there. Mere chance never dictates what God does. Rather, God dictates all things.

Example: Now sometimes when you and I are torn between two alternatives, we make decisions by flipping a coin. And if it comes up heads we do one thing, and if it comes up tails we do another.

But when God makes determinations, he doesn't flip a coin. God isn't moved by the flip of a coin. Rather, the flip of the coin is moved by God. You see, the Bible says,

The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.
Proverbs 16:33

So, mere chance does not dictate the works of God. But we go even further and suggest that,

Circumstances never dictate the works of God.

Example: Now you and I are always making adjustments based on circumstances. If the economy goes bad, we may have to sell our house. If prices at Kroger get too high, we may have to buy groceries at Wal-Mart. If the kids get out of control, we may have to send them to boarding school. If your wife gets too mouthy . . .

But, the workings of God are not dictated by changing circumstances. God moves in such a way that He dictates the circumstances.

God is moved by nothing in this universe except his own purposes. And he moves all things toward the bringing about of his purposes. And this includes the salvation of his elect.

Look at our text.

Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose . . .

And if we are saved this morning, it is because God purposed to save us.

Ephesians 1:5 puts it this way,

According to the good pleasure of his will.

Example: If I were a wealthy person and I determined to give some poor family in Ethiopia a house here in Memphis, then I would hire the contractors and build the house. Then, I would fly to Ethiopia and I would find the family. Then I would buy them air tickets and fly them here to Memphis. And I would drive them to their new home and I would take them inside to show them around. And I would sign the deed over to them and give them a set of keys. Now, after all that was done, someone might ask this family, how is it that you have a new home? And they might say, “Mr. Harvey built it for me,” and that would be true. And they might say, “Mr. Harvey came and found us in Ethiopia and brought us to Memphis and gave us a new home.” And that would be true. And they might say, “Mr. Harvey signed a deed over to us.” And that would be true. But you know what the real reason is that this family would have a new home? They would have a new home because I purposed to give them a new home.

And our text says,

Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose.

And we can say without hesitation that we are saved because God determined to save us. Now there were lots of steps along the way that resulted in our salvation. There was election and calling and conviction and the moving of the Holy Spirit on our hearts. There was regeneration whereby we were made alive. And there was repentance and faith and conversion. And God justified us. And so you see all of these acts of salvation along the way. But all of these gracious acts spring from the determination in the heart of God to save us.

But we also notice from our text that God saved us according to his grace. This is the natural conclusion of the matter. If God has saved us by his purpose and his determination, then He has saved us by grace.

Now many people think they put God into debt by their good works and they think that they can maneuver God into accepting them by their good deeds. But God is never moved to action by works. Rather God moves us to action.

We are his workmanship, the Bible says in Ephesians 2:10.

You see, our text says God saves us by grace. And this further confirms that He is moved to action by nothing but his sovereign good pleasure. And his redemptive action toward us is nothing but sheer grace. God acts freely. God does not act under duress. And God does not act under compulsion to save us. And our salvation is not left to chance. And it is not determined by mere circumstances and it is not determined by works. All we can say is that our salvation is due exclusively to his sovereign good pleasure and his grace.

Example: You know, when we gather together with that general assembly, in the heavenly Jerusalem, we will sing praises to his eternal purpose of redemption and to his grace.

Our text says,

Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace.

Now this eternal purpose of God whereby he chose to save us is the sole basis of every saving grace of God. If He has caused us to be born again, it is due to his purpose. If He has given us the gifts of repentance and faith, it is because of his determination to do so. If He has converted us from death to life and from sin to holiness, then it is because of his purpose. If He has justified us, it is because of his purpose. If He sanctifies us, it is according to his purpose. And when He glorifies us, it will be because of his purpose.

Now this purpose of God to save us, was not developed as a response to any circumstances, nor as a response to anything in this universe. For our text says,

. . . which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Now this means that our salvation cannot be attributed to anything within ourselves, nor by anything we have done, for it was given us before the world began. If we are saved, we owe our salvation to the eternal purpose of God and to his purpose alone. And this means that salvation is truly by grace. He determined to save his elect, before they even arrived on this earth and before the earth ever was created. This is why the Bible says, “We are saved by grace.”

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us . . .

Titus 3:5

God’s mercy and his grace – that’s the only reason we are sitting here worshipping Him this morning. He had mercy on us and he saved. He saved us according to his purpose and grace.

Now with respect to the eternal purpose of God whereby he saves us, we should make the following observations:

I. His purposes (including his redemptive purpose) are very wise.

“ . . . who works all things after the counsel of his own will.”

Eph. 1:11

The word “counsel” suggests careful deliberation and consultation; perhaps consultation between the persons of the Godhead. And what other committee would you suggest to determine the eternal destinies of men. God himself is the only one qualified to make such a determination. And by the wise counsel of his own will, he has purposed to save men.

The Bible teaches us that God fashioned the universe by his wisdom and understanding.

Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens.

Proverbs 3:19

And if God fashioned the universe by his wisdom, then it was by that same wisdom that he purposed to save his elect. Out of the masses of sinners, God has purposed to save some and to pass by others. And though we are not wise enough to make such a determination, God is wise enough. And so, we leave such a determination in the wise counsels of a holy God.

And all we can do is agree with Paul when he said,

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

Romans 11:33

And so we see that his purposes in redemption are very wise. But we also see that,

II. God's eternal purpose in redemption is very just.

One of the holy attributes of God is his justness. He is just. That is who he is. Justness is an essential part of his nature. God can be nothing but just. Just as God cannot lie, God cannot be unjust.

Example: This pulpit is wood. This pulpit cannot be plastic because it is wood. It would be foolish to accuse this pulpit of being plastic, because by its very nature it is wood which is not plastic.

And it is foolish to accuse God of acting unjustly because He is by his very nature just. Whatever God does must be just and right. We can count on it. We don't always have the capacity to evaluate God's acts as to their justness, because our knowledge and wisdom is limited. But we can lay our trust in Him and we can be very confident that he is just and therefore every act that He performs is imminently just.

If God sends fire and brimstone to destroy a city, he is just. If God makes one man rich and another man poor, he is just. If God brings one man to prominence and brings another man to disrepute, God is just. And if God loved Jacob and hated Esau, he is just.

And let me say this, if God freely forgives your sins and chooses not to destroy you in an eternal hell, he is just. And he is not just to freely forgive you because you were such a good person. He is just because his own Son paid the penalty on your behalf to satisfy the justness of God.

God is so imminently just, that he required the death of his own Son, in order to justly forgive sinners.

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hat set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. To declare at this time his righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Romans 3:24-26

Those that are saved are saved freely by his grace and by the pleasure of His will. And let no man stand who challenges the justness of God in saving his people. It took a crown of thorns and nails through the hands and feet, for God to remain just. But if that's what was required for God to remain just, then that's what God did.

And God is not unjust for passing over the reprobate. His justness shines through even in the condemnation of the reprobate.

Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

Romans 9:14, 15

So, God's purpose in redemption is wise because God is a very wise God. And God's purpose in redemption is just, because he is a very just God. But next, let's see that,

III. God's eternal purpose in redemption is consistent with the free agency of man.

Now I have always maintained that man does not have free will. Free will implies that the will is free from all constraints thus leaving the will with the ability to choose in one way or another. But this is not the condition of man after the fall. Man's will is in bondage. It is in bondage to his own nature and to that utter disposition toward sin.

Example: You know, a fish can act like only one thing, a fish. And that fish just loves being a fish. And he swims around and he eats bugs and worms. And he chooses to act like a fish. Now if you take him out of the water and tell him to act like a bird, he's just going to flop around on the bank. He can't chirp like a bird and he can't fly like a bird and he doesn't even want to chirp like a bird and he doesn't want to fly. All he wants to do is get back in that lake.

And that's the way fallen man is. He is swimming around in his lake of sin. And he loves it. And he loves that nasty lake and he loves eating bugs and worms. And if you tell him to get out of that lake of sin and clean up and be holy, why that's the most foreign thing in the world to him. His very nature does not allow him to make that choice.

And so, does the sinner have free will? And the answer is that he is constrained by his own nature to be unholy and he cannot and will not opt out of his condition. Do you think you have free will, sinner? Then see if you can stop sinning for one day or for one moment. Go ahead and choose to stop lying and stop cheating. Go ahead sinner and cease from your adulteries and fornications. Do you think you have free will? Then, choose to love your neighbor. And then if you think you have done something special, then choose to love your enemies. When someone

slaps you on the cheek, then choose to turn the other. When someone spitefully uses you, then pray for them. When someone curses you, then go ahead sinner, choose to bless them in return.

And you can easily see, that such a choice is not possible at all for fallen man but is only possible for a man who has a new nature in Christ.

But we do say that fallen man is a free moral agent. He acts the way he wants to act. He does what he wants to do. He says what he wants to say. But all of his acts spring from his carnal and sinful nature. He is not free to disengage from his nature and be holy. But he is free within the confines of his nature. And when he rejects God, he rejects God because he wants to reject God. And when he lies, it is because he wants to lie. And when he uses the name of Christ in vain, it is because he has a complete disregard for Christ.

So, no one is forced to be a sinner. Every man is a sinner because by nature he wants to be a sinner and he chooses to be a sinner.

God's purpose in redemption is not inconsistent with free moral agency. God doesn't compel someone to act in a way that he doesn't want to act. Rather, God gives his elect a new nature. And they want to step away from sin. Whereas the unregenerate do what they want to do, the regenerate reflect this new nature and they do what they want to do. The lost serve their god and the saved serve their God. And each is doing exactly what their nature dictates should be done. Each is doing what they want to do.

And so, we say that God's purpose in redemption is consistent with the free moral agency of man.

IV. God's eternal purpose in redemption has as its highest end the glory of God.

God purposed to save sinners, not primarily for the glory of the sinner, although it is quite glorious to be in the family of God. But God's purpose was to glorify himself.

It seems to me that all of creation is a testimony to the many attributes of God. It is almost as if God said, "Let me show myself off by the things which I will create." And by his creation we see the vastness of God. We see the wisdom and knowledge of God. We see the orderliness and the beauty of God. We see his absolute majesty. We see his goodness in his provisions for all his creatures.

But in redemption, we see his grace. How would we have ever known what a gracious God we have, had there been no sin and no sinners? Why, we would have never known the full extent of his grace. And grace is one of his crown jewels.

We sing to it when we open our hymnals. We bow the knee to it when we stop to pray. But we would have never known it nor appreciated it had we not been sinners. And not just sinners, but gross sinners, rebellious sinners and condemned sinners.

You see, this great concept of redemption is a glorious testimony to the abundant and

abounding grace of God. What a God who, by his very nature, is disposed to forgive sinners for sinning against him. He is disposed to forgive us because he is a God of grace. And if God were to wear a crown of jewels displaying his attributes, perhaps grace would be the centerpiece of that crown.

But we would not have known the full extent of his grace had it not been for his purpose in redemption. But now, he has demonstrated to his entire creation that he is full of grace. The angels marvel at it, and redeemed sinners praise him for it. And God is glorified.

V. God's eternal purpose in redemption glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ.

Example: Now my wife likes to make flower arrangements. And she always makes a nice arrangement for the kitchen table. And that arrangement of flowers is the centerpiece of the dining area. All eyes are drawn first and foremost to that beautiful and spectacular array of flowers.

And Jesus is the spectacular centerpiece of the work of redemption. And saving sinners brings recognition and honor and glory to our Savior.

Example: A great athlete needs an arena in which to display his athletic gifts. If he is a football player, he needs a football field. If he is a golfer, he needs a golf course. And if there were no football fields or golf courses, then we would never know how great these athletes were.

And Jesus performed his work of redemption in the field of the world. And when he entered the arena it was full of sinners, mocking, hateful sinners. And Jesus displayed his talent as the Great Redeemer. No one else could perform such a work. No one else was qualified and no one else was able. And the world watched as Jesus performed his amazing work of redemption in the great arena of the world.

Jesus will always and forever be known as the Redeemer, the Savior. His work of redemption will be on display for all eternity as the spectacular centerpiece in the dining hall of the redeemed.

And so, God's purpose of redemption glorifies the Redeemer.

VI. God's eternal purpose in redemption is for the eternal blessing of the redeemed.

There is a reason why Paul called us "vessels of mercy," in Romans 9.

If we are the objects of his purpose of redemption, then we are the vessels upon whom he pours out mercy now and forevermore - unrelenting, irrefutable, never ending mercy. He has chosen to be merciful to his people. He has chosen to pour the oil of grace over your head and if he has chosen to do it, then goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life and forevermore.

You see, it was for his glory, but it was also for our good. We are the benefactors. He gets the credit and we get the unthinkable blessing. He is glorified and we are justified. He is honored and we are forgiven. He sits down in glory at the right hand of the Father and we are his heirs in glory.

All of this was contemplated in the counsels of God before the foundation of the world and he set his love upon us according to his purpose of grace. We are the objects of his grace which he determined to pour out on us. And we have seen in the course of our life that he has poured grace upon us and we believe that he will continue to pour grace upon us because he has determined by his solemn and holy counsel to do it.

Now these great doctrines of grace will have one of two effects on you. You may walk away saying if that is what the Bible says, then I don't believe it. I don't want to have anything to do with a God who saves whom he will. And many walk away from God when he is displayed in his sovereignty.

Or you may leave here bowing the heart and the knee in humble and joyful thanksgiving for a God who chose to save you. Which will it be?