

The Nature of Salvation

The Sovereignty of God in Salvation (God's Saving Purpose) & The Responsibility of Man in Salvation (Man's Moral Agency)

At the very beginning of our presuppositions for talking about the subject of Salvation, I want to contest three widely-accepted concepts in terms of man's natural/spiritual ability:

- 1.) Man is an autonomous creature and can live independently of outside forces, nature, environment, physical laws, including social and emotional laws (pretexts) or supernatural/metaphysical laws of the heart and soul. **This is false. Only God is autonomous.** Humans are contingent, dependent, and non-self causing beings.
- 2.) Man has and can employ unlimited (Libertarian) free will in his life, such that man can choose to do whatever he wants, anytime he wants and be whatever he decides. **This is False. All humans have free will, but it is NOT unlimited free will.** All humans who live in this universe are naturally limited by their own physical limitations; the laws of nature/physics (i.e. gravity); history; actual opportunities available; other people's decisions and subsequent consequences; our own sinful natures and choices; and the Providence of God. Therefore, though man does have a free will (=ability to choose between available options uncoerced or forced), man **does not** have unlimited, unrestricted, or Libertarian Free WILL.

NOTE: Man's Free Will is not canceled out by God's Sovereignty, only man's autonomy is.

- 3.) Man can choose to accept or reject God's presence or salvation within his own natural power or ability. This is also **False**. Because God is not only a sovereign Being, He is also a spiritual Being and man can only rightly relate to God spiritually. Because of the Fall (Adam's sin), all of humanity is affected and all humanity is spiritually dead UNTIL God intervenes and regenerates man's "heart"/soul to give man life & salvation.

Soteriology (the study of Salvation) Basics:

Even though God clearly expresses His desire that all men need to respond to Him and His gracious offer of salvation [=an eternal & reconciled relationship with Him] (Ps. 81:10-13; 2 Pt. 3:9, 1 Tim. 2:4; Mt. 18:14; Ez. 18:23; 33:11) ... within God's gracious redemptive plan throughout history, **salvation is at some point LIMITED** – since Not all are saved (vs. Universalism) or will ever be saved (Mt. 7:13-14; 21)

So HOW is salvation limited? OR Upon what is it conditioned? [This is the question that drives Christians and theologians to explore all Scripture and attempt a cohesive, rational, & satisfying answer.]

Relevant questions when talking about the Nature of Salvation:

- 1) Is Salvation in some way limited or do all eventually people ever born go to heaven? ("all paths"=Universalism)
- 2) Does God have two "wills" or two desires/intentions- in that He desires the salvation of the world (mankind), but yet not all are ultimately saved?
- 3) Did Christ die for all people on the Cross (pay for all sins provisionally) or did Christ die only for those who will be saved?
- 4) If God is truly sovereign over ALL things, then how is it possible for mankind to be truly FREE? Aren't sovereignty and freedom incompatible (self-defeating) /illogical?
- 5) What is man's responsibility in salvation? Can man truly reject God and Holy Spirit?
- 6) For God's own perfect & righteous purpose and redemptive design – (1) does God actively reprobate (reject) some from the beginning of the world (i.e. restrict them from salvation), OR (2) simply "not" choose some for salvation, just passing over some while positively/actively choosing others? **Why would God create people He knew never would go to heaven**, especially if He sovereignly rejected these from eternity past, while electing others to faith?
- 7) If I am truly "saved" or converted, can I ever lose my salvation? Can I experience apostasy or reject my faith?

Does the Bible teach *both* God's Sovereignty and Man's Freedom (free moral agency)?

In a basic, (internally consistent soteriology), or study of salvation, one needs to be able to answer all relevant data and questions with a consistent biblical hermeneutic (Bible interpretation) and in light of **all** of the biblical data revealed. Does the Bible teach throughout all of Scripture both Sovereignty & Free Will?

Twin Truths, such as paradoxes, are both real and are not contradictions or self-defeating ideals (though they at first seem incompatible or irreconcilable). The Bible reveals twin truths of both God's sovereignty and man's freedom (free will) and responsibility. Consider: (Acts 4:27-28; Lk. 22:22; Rev. 13:8; & Jn. 10:18) Then READ John 6:29-70) = and discover that in this passage both man's free will and God's sovereignty in salvation are real.

SO, How are we saved? Consider the answer from two vantage points/perspectives. We need to look at the process of salvation through Man's lens (experience) AND what the Bible reveals about God's part in the saving of man's soul. **BOTH** are true and necessary.

From Man's perspective and in man's personal experience . . .

In the **Present, Temporal Reality (i.e. time & space)**, consider what man experiences when he is saved:

As the Gospel is preached (Rom. 10:17ff), the Word of God is delivered; the Holy Spirit is working and drawing (Jn. 6:44; 63), and Christ's genuine offer of salvation is made plainly available to the world (to man's heart) [Ephesians 1:13]; man understand the message, his lostness & real need of a Savior, and as he "feels" God's prompting - man must comes to terms with the:

- A. **General (Natural) Revelation** of God (Rom. 1:16ff) = of God's existence, reality, and God's complex design of creation. There is a God. We are NOT God. God is to be worshipped (b/c of God's sovereignty & providence)
- All of mankind were created with knowledge of God's existence (in our soul, conscience, & in all of creation)
- B. "Light" or **Truth** – that he has been given (i.e. Acts 8:26ff –the Ethiopian Eunuch; Acts 10:1ff - Cornelius)
- C. **Special Revelation** of Jesus (Jn. 3:16-20) = Jesus is God & Jesus is only way to heaven (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)

So, (on earth & in the present), through his own perceived free will [moral agency], **man** then **RESPONDS**. He:

1. **Thinks** about God (Ro.1:18-23)
2. **Desires** to know more about "God" (Acts 8 –Ethiopian Eunuch; Acts 10 Cornelius)
3. **Responds** to the "light"/Truth given about God (John 14:12-14; Mk. 11:24)
4. **Embraces** more Truth given about God, Jesus, and the gospel message (Ro. 10:17; Eph. 1:13)
5. **Experiences** conviction in his spirit/soul that he is sinner and needs a savior (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Jn. 1:9)
6. **Believes** (accepts) that he needs to repent of his sins in order to be saved (Acts 2:38; 3:19; Heb. 11:6)
7. And . . . He then **actively CHOOSES** salvation, by believing in/upon Jesus (i.e. "faiths"/trusts in) Jesus Christ to save him & asking Jesus into his life for salvation (Jn. 3:16; 3:36; Mk. 16:16; Rom. 10:9, 13; 1 Jn. 5:1; Rev. 22:17)

The Bible teaches that **every man is responsible** for himself to respond to the gospel, inferring that he *can* & *should* in order to be converted (Mt. 11:28; Lk. 5:31-32; 13:3; Acts 2:40; 3:19; 13:38-39; 17:30; Jn. 5:24; 8:24)

The Bible also teaches that in man's natural rebellious state and in his own sinful nature, man naturally and (freely acting upon one's own deepest desire/inclination) willfully rejects God (Mt. 23:37; Lk. 7:30; Heb. 12:15)

The tough reality is that **UNLESS** God intervenes to save anyone, all mankind is lost in their sin and will naturally reject God and willfully choose separation from God since man wants to be in charge and be his own 'god.'
(Gen. 6:5-6; 1 Cor. 2:12; Romans 3:10-12; Ps. 53:1-3; judges 21:25; Rom. 3:23; 6:23)

From God's Perspective and as revealed in Scripture . . .

In **Spiritual Reality** (Non-temporal/eternal) OR in **Eternity Past**:

Before the foundation of the world, before creation - God knew you, loved you, and chose you In HIM before He ever even created you (Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8; 17:8)

- Thus, both Creation and our Salvation are from the Lord (Jonah 2:9)
- God chooses us and saved us **NOT** based on our worth, "faith" or good deeds (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; 2 Tim. 1:9)
- The Bible teaches that God chooses/ELECTS those who will be His children (Acts 13:48; 16:14; Ro. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:4-5; 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:13; Jn 15:16). God chooses/elects those who will be saved even before they are born (Eph. 1:4-5)

So, God in His sovereignty – chooses us, and predestines those whom He chooses to become His children. God actively saves/converts our spiritually dead souls into those who have spiritual life and salvation.

God converts our souls through REGENERATION (or by His Spirit making what is dead, now alive) (Titus 3:5-6)

In the process of saving us, the Holy Spirit *in the present* (temporally) then:

1. **Initiated** the concept and need for salvation in your life (John 15:26; 16:8-11)
2. **Called** you to salvation and life (Ti. 2:11-14)
3. **Drew you** to God and showed you your guilt (Jn. 6:44; 65; Eph. 1:18; 1 Cor. 2:14)
4. **Provided** you with saving faith as a grace gift of God (Eph. 2:9; 1 Th. 1:9; 2 Cor. 7:7:10)
5. **Regenerated** your heart from death to life (Jn. 6:63; Titus 3:5; 1 Pt. 1:2; 2 Th. 2:13-14; 2 Cor. 3:6)
6. **Enabled** your belief (Ez. 36:26)
7. **Filled** you permanently with life (Ro. 8:10) and His Holy Spirit.

Thus, when we were DEAD spiritually, **Christ alone made us Alive** (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13; 1 Pt. 1:3)

Salvation then is based solely in GOD, for God's glory and by His good will and pleasure.

- He elected and chose us BEFORE the foundation of the world (Mt. 42:22; 1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:4; Jn. 15:16; 2 Th. 2:13; Rev. 17:14)
- He Predestined us to salvation (Ro. 8:29; Acts 13:48)
- God grants repentant hearts (2 Tim. 2:25) & The Lord opens hearts (Acts 16:14)
- God can and does close the heart and "seal" one's fate (2 Th. 2:10-12)

Thus, Salvation is **NOT** based on:

-Man's choice of God; Man's future belief or choice in God; God's foreknowledge of man's future free acts/choices.

Though God is completely sovereign in election and predestination over all who are saved throughout eternity, based in God's justice – **All** of mankind are already damned, and justly condemned to Hell (Rom. 3:23; 5:12; 5:18; 6:23; Jn. 3:18)

The reality that ANY are at all saved = God's Mercy and Grace.

Thus, in SALVATION – the process of converting the soul starts and ends with God. Yet, man (on the earth) is responsible for responding to the gospel and trusting in Christ for salvation.
BOTH ARE TRUE! BOTH occur in salvation.

Both And verses: (1 Tim. 4:10; Jn. 1:12-13; 6:29; Acts 17:26-27; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; 2 Thess. 2:13)

Thoughts about Salvation and Conclusions

1-God is Holy; Righteous; Just; and Love; (Ps. 77:13; 2 Thess. 1:6ff; 1 Jn. 4:8)

2-God has provided for the salvation (atonement) of the whole world (1Jn. 2:2) via Jesus

3-Heaven and eternity with God is a reality and a possibility for those who are saved (Jn. 3:16)

4-Likewise, Hell (the eternal separation from God's presence) is real and exists to demonstrate God's utter Love and Justice within mankind (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43-47; Luke 12:6; 16:23).

5-The Bible teaches that though God is love, heaven is real, and salvation is possible for the entire world, that STILL...the majority of humanity will spend an eternity in Hell. (Mt. 7:13- 14)

6-Thus, God created this universe where in eternity past (spiritually) & in time (temporally) *simultaneously* God both Hands over [Rom. 1:24ff; 2 Thess. 2:11-12 (passes over) the non-elect/LOST while the non-elect simultaneously choose to reject God and seek their own way. Their hearts are bent away from God and He simply allows them to have (satisfy) the desires of their own heart/will = separation from God (His holiness). This demonstrates God's love in that HE never forces any to have to receive Him.

*Hell exists (as the ultimate/eternal separation from God) as God's mercy on those who reject God & will never choose Him (though He will never choose them). Hell is the just punishment for our evil deeds. b/c God loves humanity & does no violence to man's free moral agency, Hell exists to show world (the elect) God's love.

*(Consider why the Bible states why God created these who He would never elect/redeem: Ro. 9:22-29)

7-And God is just that awesome that He is able to create a universe where simultaneously He is sovereignly directing the paths and eternity of men (Pr. 21:1; Ezra 1:1; Dan. 1:9), while men, *temporally*, are choosing and responding to God by faith. He initiates as the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2)...to God be the glory –not man (Eph. 2:8-9).

Therefore, in temporal reality, founded in God's justice, mercy, and enduring love –

1. God forces Himself on no one (none who would/will resist/reject Him); He does not force His will on those who do not want to be saved. (i.e. 2 Cor. 8:16-17) – Yet, none can ever choose God on their own.
2. God does no violence to our free moral agency as human beings in salvation. We will be free in Heaven as well – but free (in our spiritual state) to freely worship and love the Lord with all our beings.
3. None who are saved, in that moment of conversion, wanted or truly desired to reject God or were passionate to resist God's saving grace. God did not force Himself on them. God did change their heart in His mercy – to accept
4. Conversely, none of the reprobate ever earned any grace and all who are damned and condemned are each guilty of original, active, and rebellious sin toward God. They actively reject God and never desired God/heaven.
5. None of the reprobate ever wanted or truly desired God, or saving faith, but only continually desired their own free choice to reject God, resist God, and cut off all means of Truth and Christ as only way to Salvation. In essence, God does not reject and damn any that ever wanted Christ or truly desired salvation in Him. God knows all things. God knows all hearts. God is JUST, merciful, and loving – but any that choose Christ are because He mercifully drew them to Himself and changed their dead hearts into life.
6. Though man can seemingly resist the Holy Spirit, the elect (those who will be saved) don't resist the Spirit. Only God knows how this works and the timing/process of when man will respond to the gospel by His grace.
7. On earth, temporally, from man's perspective/experience: God does know who desires, who would desire, who will desire to be saved – though He does not base salvation on their future free act of desiring to be saved or choosing Christ. God does the work of salvation and initiates salvation with each soul in time/space;

= Man, through God's invisible and spiritual work of graciously converting the soul, chooses Christ and is saved.

This is a mystery. This is Biblical. This is True. And We are all called to go and share the gospel with every soul on earth, earnestly praying that each precious soul would hear the gospel and be marvelously converted to Christ –
BY GOD'S GRACE!