

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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## EXCURSUS: CALVINISM VS. ARMINIANISM (Part II)

Today's evangelicals do not look so much to the Bible, to the reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, for clues about how to present the gospel to the world of unbelief. They look instead to the smorgasbord of secular psychologies, philosophies and spiritualities to find contact points. And their gospel is no longer the theologically articulated gospel of forty years ago. Today it is a syncretistic combination of secular methodologies and superficial biblical language aimed at 'felt needs' rather than hellbound sinners. Can we really imagine the apostle Paul insisting that the gospel be made 'user-friendly?' Paul taught that the power of the gospel is located in the preaching of God's Word, not in its ability to absorb intellectual pop culture."<sup>1</sup> The word *syncretistic* has reference to the inherent tendency of the fallen human heart to combine our feeble efforts with a little assistance from God in order to secure for ourselves divine blessing. The noted Dutch theologian G. C. Berkouwer correctly observed. "In such a notion God's decision is made dependent on man's decision. The initiative and the majesty of God's grace is overshadowed. Even if we reject the idea of God being a mere spectator in man's decision, once we yield to the priority of man's decision, we are no longer competent to resist the pressure of the idea that God is a mere onlooker. *Sola gratia* and foreknowledge must be connected in a synthesis. It is the synthesis of synergism in which the significance of the doctrine of election is violated. In no form of synergism is it possible to escape the conclusion that man owes his salvation not solely to God but also to himself. Still more accurately, he may thank himself – by virtue of his decision to believe – that salvation actually and effectively becomes his in time and eternity. To be sure, synergism is constantly seeking to avoid this conclusion, and it is seldom expressed in so many words that salvation really depends partly on man. Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot in the long run be avoided and it is clear that we actually are confronted here with the real problem of synergism as it results in a certain amount of human self-conceit."<sup>2</sup>

### I. THE GROUND OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN (Eph. 1:11-12)

God the Father has elected and adopted believers through Christ (1:4-5). God the Son has redeemed the elect (1:7). God has been pleased to bestow upon the redeemed the gifts of wisdom and understanding so that they can grasp the mystery of His will. Although the activity of the Holy Spirit had been implied, He has yet to be mentioned directly. Paul now comes to the subject of the Holy Spirit, and in doing so, he rehearses the Trinitarian work of redemption. Having mentioned the consummation of all things in Christ, the Apostle returns to what he had stated in 1:4, 5 — IN WHOM (Christ) WE WERE CHOSEN. The question naturally arises - - why were we elected?<sup>3</sup>

#### A. The Elect Have Been Predestinated

Here and in 1:5, Paul uses the PROORIZ□. This is a compound of PRO (in front of or before) and HORIZ□ (TO ORDAIN, DETERMINE). Wherever this work occurs in the New Testament, it refers to the eternal counsel of God (Acts 4:28, Romans 8:29-30; I Corinthians 2:7).

#### B. Predestination Is Based on God's Sovereign Will

There is a fixed, all-embracing plan that God is accomplishing. He *works* ENERGOUNTOS (this word means to be effective and implies the certainty of accomplishment) to accomplish His purpose.

C. Predestination Is Unto the Glory of God

Ephesians 1:3-14 in the original is actually one long sequence! Paul is enthralled with the work of this blessed God and over and over again he directs our attention to God's glorious grace.

II. **THE MEANS OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN (1:12, 13)**

The first step in accomplishing the eternal plan of God has already been dealt with in 1:7. The actual *accomplishment* of redemption was secured by Christ. There remains the *application* of this to the elect down through the ages. There are three distinct things to note.

A. The Proclamation of the Gospel

Apart from the preaching of "the word of truth," the gospel of salvation, there can be no acceptance and confession of Christ (Romans 10:17), but preaching is not enough.

B. The Effectual Work of the Holy Spirit

There is a *general* call to all who hear the gospel. The *effectual* call is the regenerating work of the Spirit in the hearts of the elect (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Titus 3:5, 6).

C. The Reception of The Gospel

The elect exercise saving faith. The Holy Spirit so works in the elect that they are made willing. The Spirit's work has only just begun.

II. **THE GOAL OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN (1:13, 14)**

The Spirit is here called the *promised* Holy Spirit (cf. Galatians 3:14) and is the *seal* with which believers have been sealed (cf. Ephesians 4:30, 2 Corinthians 1:21). This word SPHRAGIZΩ means to set a mark of ownership. Believers are, as it were, stamped and authenticated as belonging to God.<sup>4</sup> This seal serves a three-fold function.

A. The Pledge. ARRABΩN literally referred to earnest money, a down-payment, the first installment guaranteeing the rest.

B. The Pinnacle. The pledge guarantees the inheritance (KLERONOMIAS—a right to possess, a legal entitlement). The highest point or culmination of redemption is yet to come, but we have the installment.

C. The Purpose. The Holy Spirit testifies that we are the children of God (Romans 8:15-17). We are His *possession* (PERIPOIΩSEΩS refers to a remnant with the idea of obtaining and preserving it). What God has purchased with the blood of His Son He will not lose! Is it any wonder that Paul, who began this section exalting our blessed God, should conclude with "to the praise of His glory!"

**CONCLUSION:** This section of Ephesians 1:3-14 is saturated with THREE predominant themes:

- (1) All blessings are in Christ, in Him we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, given wisdom and understanding, sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise, and have obtained an inheritance.
- (2) All blessings stem from God's sovereign good pleasure. He is the Sovereign God of grace. He rules and ordains all things.
- (3) All blessings are to bring praise and glory to the Sovereign God of all grace, who is ... BLESSED!

Finally, the modern day charismatic movement is the outgrowth of Pentecostalism which had its beginning around the start of this century. Although I would not question the genuineness or sincerity of many Christians associated with this particular branch of the Christian faith, it is, however, my personal conviction (and a very firm one) that Pentecostal/Charismatic distinctives are responsible for sowing more dissension and spreading more confusion in the church than just about anything else in the twentieth century. It's not uncommon to hear charismatics claim that until they came along the Holy Spirit was the neglected member of the Trinity or that He was practically *in absentia* in the life of the church until the birth of Pentecostalism! One of the labels that charismatics like to use to identify themselves is "Spirit-filled." The clear implication is that if you do not practice their distinctives (speaking in tongues, being slain in the Spirit, prophesying, etc.) then you are *not* Spirit-filled. This can be somewhat intimidating to some Christians who are tempted to wonder, "Am I missing out? Am I guilty of quenching the Spirit because I have not experienced these charismatic distinctives in my life?"

This message is not designed to attempt a full-fledged refutation of the arguments used by charismatics to defend their position. Rather, we are going to focus on what the Apostle Paul says is really the focal point of the Holy Spirit—the glorification of Christ (John 15:26; 16:13-14). “Whenever the church has forgotten this it has tended to call attention to the Holy Spirit rather than Christ and has fallen into an unhealthy and often divisive subjectivism. When people ask, ‘Do you have the Holy Spirit?’ ‘Have you had a second experience of the Holy Spirit?’ ‘Have you received the gift of tongues (or whatever other evidence of the presence of the Spirit is being particularly stressed at that time)?’—then the church is divided! When the church has remembered that the role of the Spirit is to glorify Christ, then all the other activities of the Holy Spirit—sanctification, inspiration, the giving of gifts, even the work of creation and anything else that might be mentioned—are seen within that framework, and the church is drawn together around Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> R.K. McGregor Wright, No Place for Sovereignty: What’s Wrong with Freewill Theism? (IVP, 1996) p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, Studies in Dogmatics: Divine Election (Eerdmans, 1960) p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> EKLĒRŌTHĒMEN is the term Paul used here. It is in the aorist passive which tells us that the action of electing was not the result of our choosing. This is made all the clearer in John 15:16. In commenting on this passage, R. W. Yarbrough writes, “In various ways and to various degrees, the language of these verses comports with a general understanding that behind knowledge of, or relation to, Christ stands divine election. Believers are ultimately dependent on a gracious working that is deeper and more powerful than human resolve or response could, or should, hope to be.” *Divine Election in the Gospel of John*, in The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will: Biblical and Practical Perspective on Calvinism I, eds. T.R. Schreiner & B.A. Ware, (Baker, 1995), p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> This sealing took place “at the time” you believed. The KJV translation “after that ye believed” is incorrect. The participles *hearing* and *believing* are temporal and express contemporaneous time. Cf. F. Rienecker, A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Zondervan, 1976), p. 523.

<sup>5</sup> J. M. Boice, Ephesians: An Expository Commentary (Baker, 1997), p. 29.