

Abstract to the Doctrine of Salvation

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To all who love Jesus Christ, the following doctrinal summary is offered in the confidence that upon careful inspection of the scriptural proofs advanced, all unprejudiced minds will be convinced that salvation is of the Lord and not of man.

I) Total Depravity of Natural Man – All men are sinners by nature and are dead to spiritual things while in their natural state.

The fact all men are sinners is asserted throughout the scriptures (Gen 6:5, Gen 8:21, Job 25:4-6, Ec 7:20, Is 64:6, Mt 19:17, Rom 3:10-23). The scriptures also teach all men must be spiritually quickened before entering heaven (Jn 3:3-5). This is because all men are born with a corrupted nature that is unsuitable for heavenly existence (Ps 51:5, Ps 58:3, Job 14:4, Job 15:14-16). Furthermore, all men fall under the general condemnation of Adam's transgression (Rom 5:12-14, 1Cor 15:21), and this is evidenced by the fact that all men die.

The scriptures frequently describe natural man as being *dead* in trespasses and sins (Jn 5:25, Eph 2:1, Col 2:13). Being in a state of spiritual death, natural man is incapable of spiritual understanding, appreciation, and action (1Cor 2:14, Rom 8:5-10). A natural man therefore has neither the ability nor the desire to perform any spiritual action (e.g. belief, baptism, etc.) that is presumed to save him to heaven (Jn 6:44-65, Jn 8:43-47, Jn 10:26, 1Cor 1:18, 2Thes 3:1-2, Rom 15:30-31).

Since spiritual activity derives from spiritual life, such activity can never be the cause of spiritual life. Spiritual life, like natural life, comes only from the quickening power of God (Jn 5:25-29, Eph 1:19-20, Eph 2:1, Col 2:13). Spiritual activity then manifests the life God has already given.

Total depravity does not imply natural man is without freedom of will. He has freedom to do both good and evil. However, the corrupt *nature* of man will cause him to prefer evil as predictably as the righteous nature of God will cause Him to choose good. A corrupt man can choose to do good, but he cannot do it *and like it* because his natural heart is corrupt. Accordingly, the scriptures present man's problem as being one of nature - not one of will (Mt 12:33-35, Rom 8:5-10, 1Cor 2:14-16, Eph 2:1-3).

Man's corrupted nature is itself the product of sin, deriving originally from the sin of Adam, and furthered by personal sins (Jn 8:34, Rom 6:15-18, 2Pet 2:19-22). Alcoholism both causes and is caused by drinking. Similarly, all sins tend to self-perpetuate through corruption of nature.

II) Personal and Unconditional Election – All who are to possess spiritual life were personally chosen by God to receive such life; moreover, this choice was not based upon any merit seen or foreseen in the elected; rather, it was motivated by the sovereign love of God.

There are numerous scriptures teaching that God has elected or chosen a people for salvation (Mt 24:24, Mt 24:31, Lk 18:7, Rom 8:33, Rom 9:11, Rom 11:7, Eph 1:4, Col 3:12, 1Thes 1:4, 2Thes 2:13, Tit 1:1, 1Pet 1:2, 1Pet 2:9). The elect are elsewhere described as having been *given* by the Father to Christ (Mt 1:21, Lk 1:21, Jn 6:37-40, Jn 10:25-29, Jn 17:1-2, Acts 18:10).

The scriptures offer no justification for the theory claiming that election was based upon foreseen obedience in the elected. To the contrary, all men were foreseen as being disobedient (Ps 14:2-3, Rom 3:10-23, Rom 11:32, Eph 2:1-3, Tit 3:3-5). Accordingly, election could not have been based upon any spiritual action in the elect since totally depraved man is spiritually dead.

The scriptures teach that men were elected *unto* obedience (Eph 1:3-5, Eph 2:8-10, 1Pet 1:2, 1Pet 2:9). Therefore, election could not have been based upon such.

The doctrine of election is frequently charged with unfairness in that it is claimed to exclude some believers from the scheme of redemption. This charge is itself unfair because we affirm that belief in Christ and obedience to His commandments are the *fruits* of election; therefore, all such persons are in fact the elect of God (Acts 13:48, 1Thes 1:4, 1Pet 1:2, 1Jn 4:19).

The wicked were not elected to hell in the same sense in which others were elected to heaven. Rather, the wicked were simply left to their own choices and to the just consequences of such, whereas the elect were chosen to receive an unsolicited change of heart. The scriptures state that the righteous will enter a kingdom *prepared for them from the foundation of the world*, but such language is not used of the wicked, who are instead told to enter fire *prepared for the Devil and his angels* (Mt 25:31-46).

III) Effectual Atonement – The saving benefits of Christ's death were intended for the elect only; furthermore, His redemptive work was alone sufficient to secure their salvation.

The death of Christ was intended either for all people or some people. If the former be true, then Christ's death did not actually secure salvation for any; rather, it merely made salvation possible for all. However, the scriptures teach that Christ came to accomplish definite salvation for a definite number of people (Mt 1:21, Lk 19:10, Jn 6:37, Jn 17:1). The scriptures also teach that Christ was victorious unto this end (Rom 8:32, Rom 5:10, 2Cor 5:14, 2Tim 2:11).

If the death of Christ were intended for all people, then the fact that not all people will be saved implies that conditions apart from the death of Christ are needful for salvation. The various denominations differ in their claims as to what these conditions are; however, all of the proposed conditions are sadly alike in one important regard; namely, not all people have had the opportunity to comply with them. It is inconsistent to claim God loved all people to the extent He would die for their salvation, but that He did not love all people to the extent He would give all opportunity to procure the benefits of this death.

Critics of special atonement frequently claim that God would be unfair if He did not give all men opportunity to be saved. Such reasoning fails to appreciate the fact that God is under no obligation to save anyone and that salvation is purely a gift of grace. Furthermore, if God is

obligated to provide opportunity to all, then it follows that He is also obligated to give *equal* opportunity to all, yet experience plainly shows He has not done this.

Those who are not included in the atonement make no such complaint of unfairness because they profess no need of Christ; reject Him, and consider all who believe on Him to be foolish (1Cor 2:14).

The claim God loved all men to the extent that Christ died for all men is inconsistent with what the scriptures teach about the love of God. This inconsistency occurs at several points:

- 1) Though God never deals unjustly with any man, the scriptures clearly teach His grace is not extended in equal degrees to all men (Mt 11:25, Mt 20:1-16, Lk 4:25-27, Rom 9:11-24, 2Thes 2:13). Inasmuch as grace derives from the love of God, varying degrees of grace imply varying degrees of love.
- 2) The scriptures teach that God's corrective chastisement is upon all He loves. But the scriptures also teach that not all are under this chastisement (Ps 93:12-13, 1Cor 11:32, Heb 12:6-8, Rev 3:19).
- 3) The scriptures teach God's love is effectual in the sense that it produces change in those receiving it; however, in no case is the effect universally observed; therefore, the cause cannot be universally applied (1Jn 4:19, Tit 3:3-5, Eph 2:4-5).
- 4) God's love is presented as an assurance of salvation (2Tim 2:19, Rom 8:32, Rom 8:38), yet it could be of no assurance at all if others under this same love will finally be damned. Salvation is assured by God's love because He changes not (Is 49:15, Jer 31:3, Mal 3:6, Heb 13:5, Heb 13:8). The unchangeableness of His love implies that if He ever loved one to the extent that He would die for them and save them, then He will continue to love them to this same extent through all eternity.

A great problem with the idea of universal atonement is that it assumes Christ did no more than purchase a mere possibility of redemption. This error is overwhelmingly refuted by scriptures, which resolutely declare that *all* spiritual blessings are in Christ. See Eph 1:3 and also: Mt 1:21, Mt 11:27, Lk 19:10, Jn 1:18, Jn 5:25-29, Jn 10:16, Jn 12:32, Rom 14:9, 1Cor 6:20, 1Cor 15:41, Eph 2:1-6, Eph 5:25-26, Col 2:10-11, Tit 2:14, 1Pet 1:21. This list of scriptures even attribute the new birth to His death on the cross. Now if He died for all men, then His death cannot be credited with any more than what is common to all men. Not all men are born again. Much less do they experience all other things the Bible attributes to Him.

Scriptures which refer to God loving the "world" or to Christ being given to the "world" (Jn 3:16, 1Jn 2:2) do not encompass all people without exception. Instead, such scriptures are intended to teach that God's love extends beyond the bounds of the Jewish people unto every nation, kindred, people and tongue (Rev 7:9). The term "world" is used repeatedly in the scriptures in a limited sense; however, this fact seldom receives proper recognition. In the Gospel of John alone there are such usages in: Jn 6:33, Jn 8:12, Jn 8:26, Jn 12:19, Jn 14:19, Jn 15:18, Jn 16:20, Jn 17:9, Jn 17:14, Jn 18:20. It is unfortunate that the few texts which are misinterpreted as teaching universal atonement are not interpreted in light of the many texts which describe Christ's work as being for a special group of people (Mt 1:21, Jn 10:11, Jn 11:51, Jn 15:13, Jn 17:1, Rom 8:32-33, Eph 5:25, Tit 2:14, Heb 9:15).

IV) Irresistible Grace – All of the elect will be quickened by the Spirit of God.

Jesus taught one could enter the Kingdom of God only after being born again (Jn 3:3, Jn 3:5). Jesus also taught that all who were given to Him by the Father would indeed come to Him and be raised at the last day (Jn 6:37-40, Jn 10:27-29, Jn 17:1-2). It follows that all given by the Father to Christ will be born again.

Natural man, being unreceptive to spiritual things, would invariably resist the spiritual birth if he could. The quickening power of God's Spirit must therefore be irresistibly imposed. This reasoning is confirmed by the fact that the scriptures consistently describe salvation as being the result of God's will and not of man's (Jn 1:11-13, Jn 5:21, Rom 9:11-16, 2Tim 1:9-10, Heb 10:7-10).

Jesus taught that the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth is analogous to the wind in that it is sovereign and irresistible (Jn 3:8). Jesus also taught this was the case for everyone that is born of the Spirit.

The principle of irresistible grace is clearly illustrated in the case of Paul on Damascus road. Since the Spirit works in similar fashion for all (Jn 3:8), it follows that all must experience the same irresistible power that confronted Paul. Accordingly, Paul later claimed his experience to be a pattern for all believers (1Tim 1:12-16).

All analogies of the new birth presented in the scriptures suggest an irresistible power working on a passive object. In particular, the acquisition of spiritual life is presented in the scriptures as being analogous to:

- 1) Birth – Jn 1:11-13, Jn 3:3-8
- 2) Quickening – Eph 2:1-5, Col 2:13
- 3) Translation – Col 1:12-13
- 4) Resurrection – Jn 5:25-29
- 5) Creation – 2Cor 5:17, Eph 2:10

No individual experiencing one of these transitions ever contributed in the least degree to it, nor have they ever successfully resisted it.

V) Preservation of the Saints – The blood of Christ is sufficient both to procure and secure the salvation of all for whom it was shed. Therefore, all of the elect will finally be saved.

The scriptures directly assert all saved persons are the *current possessors* of eternal life (Jn 3:36, Jn 5:24, Jn 6:47, Jn 6:54, 1Jn 5:11) and that this life can never be lost (Jn 6:37-39, Jn 10:28, Rom 8:35-39, 1Pet 1:3-5). Indeed, life which can be lost cannot properly be called *eternal*.

The Lord's people are said to be “predestined” to glorification (Rom 8:28-30, Eph 1:3-6), but a predestined event is irreversible by definition. Romans 8:29 asserts all who are called and

justified are also predestined to glorification. It follows that any falling short of glorification must never have been truly called and justified.

Man can be condemned to hell only after a valid charge has been made against him. This cannot be the case for God's children (Rom 8:33) since they are sanctified once for all (Heb 10:10) and are forever perfected (Heb 10:14).

Were eternal life secured by man's power, it would doubtlessly be lost. However, the scriptures teach eternal life is secured by the infinite power of God (Jn 10:27-29, 1Cor 1:8, Philip 1:6, 1Thes 5:23, 1Pet 1:5).

The truth of preservation is implied when the scriptures describe the saved as being "children of God." Hence, they are in vital *relationship* with God in the same sense in which a son has vital relationship with his natural father. This relationship can never be destroyed. That is, a man can never cease to be his father's son. However, the *fellowship* between a father and son can be greatly diminished through the son's disobedience. This is also the case between God and His children.

The doctrine of preservation is not intended to teach that saved persons can sin with impunity. The changed nature of a saved man prohibits him from finding peace and happiness in sin. The scriptures also teach God that will bring corrective chastisement against all of His disobedient children (Ps 93:12-13, 1Cor 11:32, Heb 12:6-8, Rev 3:19). Accordingly, scriptures teach the power of God's Spirit is ever at work within His children bringing forth the fruits of righteousness (Philip 2:13, 1Thes 4:9, 2Thes 3:3).

Though the Spirit of God moves His people both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philip 2:13), both scriptures and experience teach this Divine influence is not of such degree as to produce perfection. Therefore, the good works performed by saved persons cannot account for the preservation of their eternal salvation. Salvation is both obtained and maintained by the grace of God. The scriptures often associate good works with eternal salvation, but salvation is not the result of works; rather, works are the result of salvation (Mt 12:33-35, Jn 8:43-47, Jn 10:25-29, Jn 15:16-19, Acts 11:18, Acts 13:48, Acts 16:14, 1Cor 1:22-24, 1Cor 1:30-31, Gal 5:22-24, Eph 1:4-5, Eph 2:10, 1Thes 1:4-5, 2Thes 2:13-14, 1Pet 2:9).

VI) Immediate Regeneration – The Holy Spirit accomplishes the new birth by direct operation upon the heart, and therefore works independently of all mediation by man, including the gospel as preached by man.

Jesus said, "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,*" (Jn 3:3); hence, a man is not born again *by* seeing the Kingdom of God; rather, being born again is *prerequisite* to him perceiving the Kingdom, and of course also the King. As natural birth is the first step in natural experience, even must spiritual birth be the first step in spiritual experience.

Since the gospel is a spiritual thing, and since natural man rejects things of the Spirit, the gospel can never serve towards elevating natural men to a state of spirituality. Belief of the gospel is

not a cause of spiritual birth; rather, it is a manifestation of such birth (Jn 1:11-13, Jn 5:24, Jn 8:43-47, Jn 10:25-27, Acts 13:48, 1Cor 1:18, Gal 5:22-23, 1Thes 1:4-5).

The scriptures teach that certain infants have experienced spiritual birth (Ps 8:2, Ps 22:9, Mt 11:25, Mt 21:16, Lk 1:15, Lk 1:41) even though infants are incapable of receiving the preached word. However, the scriptures offer no support to the theory that infants are spiritually quickened by means other than adults. Indeed, the opposite is suggested (Mk 10:15). Nor do the scriptures teach a different scheme of spiritual quickening for those in Old Testament times. There is but one method of spiritual quickening that can be common to all; namely, by immediate or direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught that those dead in trespasses and sins would be quickened by the power of his “voice” (Jn 5:25-29). In this same context it is taught that this voice will also raise the bodily dead at the end of time. A man can give the *words* of Christ but not His *voice*, and as Christ will not use man to raise the bodily dead, neither does He use man to raise the spiritually dead.

If it were the purpose of the gospel to accomplish spiritual birth in natural men, then the gospel should be most urgently directed toward the nonspiritual. In fact, this is not its principal direction in the scriptures (2Thes 3:1-3, Rom 15:31, Acts 18:9-10).

Though certain of the elect may be deprived of the natural faculties or circumstances necessary to receive the preached word (2Sam 12:18-23, Mt 9:37-38, Rom 15:30-31, 2Thes 3:1), such considerations do not limit the power of God to directly reveal His Son in the hearts of all the elect (Mt 11:25, Mt 16:17, Mt 21:16, Lk 1:15, Lk 23:39-43, Jn 5:25, Jn 5:38, Jn 6:37, Jn 6:44-45, Gal 3:8, Heb 8:10-12).

VII) Gospel Certification – The role of the gospel in the work of eternal salvation is to bring those quickened by the Spirit unto faith and obedience to Jesus Christ, upon which their eternal life is made manifest and sure. Obedience to the gospel is the *confirmation*, not the *cause*, of eternal life.

Though the Spirit produces life without the means of the preached word, it is the gospel that brings this life and immortality to light (Rom 1:16-17, 2Tim 1:9-10). The quickening work of the Spirit gives a new nature that is powerfully disposed to Christ and spiritual truth, but only the gospel can bring a knowledge of Christ to the conscience in a form and degree sufficient to assure one of eternal salvation.

The gospel establishes believers in the truth, convicts them of their sins, and leads them to repentance (Ps 119:9-11, Acts 17:30-31, Col 1:3-6, 2Tim 3:16-17) that God may be glorified, both by their profession and works (Mt 5:16, Acts 13:48, Rom 15:8-9, 1Cor 6:20, Philip 2:9-11, 2Thes 1:12, 2Thes 3:1).

The gospel is the “power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Rom 1:16, 1Cor 1:18, 1Cor 1:23-24) in the sense that it delivers those quickened by the Spirit from the darkness of Satan unto the light of Christ (Jn 8:12, Jn 12:46, Acts 13:47, 1Jn 1:5), leading them to the discovery of their Savior (1Cor 14:24-25) and transforming them toward the example of His life

(2Cor 3:18, Philip 2:5-11, 1Jn 2:6), all of which will be brought to perfection at His glorious appearing (1Cor 15:51-57, Philip 3:20-21, 1Jn 3:2).

All other forms of knowledge are inferior to the gospel (Philip 3:8-11), and without the gospel there can be no true worship (Jn 4:24, Jn 5:22-23).

The gospel is inherently evangelical. All who are blessed to have it are commanded to teach it to others also (Mt 5:14-16, Mt 10:27, 2Tim 4:1-6, 1Pet 3:15), and this should be the happy task of all who love God's truth and His children.

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