

Doctrine of Salvation (2): Predestination, Justification and the Glory of God

'Salvation belongs to the Lord' (Jonah 2v9)

The Bible from beginning to end is the story of God's salvation – his work to restore the relationship between himself and humanity he created.

Genesis 3

- The LORD chases after man (v9)
- The LORD promises the redeemer (v15)
- The LORD clothes Adam and Eve (v21)
- The LORD denies access to the tree of life
 - This is judgment – corresponding to their being cut off from fellowship with the Father and the Son whom to know is eternal life.
 - This is grace – to prevent them grasping at the sacrament¹ they are not in a state to receive and so bringing judgment on themselves (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27-31); to keep them from touching the holy things that no-one but a priest² should touch (cf. Ex. 25:31-40;³ Numbers 4:1-20); to keep them from grasping in their own strength what they have rejected by their faithlessness (cf. Num. 14:39-45).⁴

Romans 9

- The objections to predestination are anticipated! (v14, 19)
- God's election means that salvation is all grace and not at all by works (v11)
- It is about mercy (v15-16) – the starting position is not neutral but that we are under God's wrath (cf. Rom. 1:18). We start in death and condemnation. God is not obligated to save anyone out of this, he didn't need to provide an ark in the days of Noah, but in his mercy he will save many.
- God has destined some for destruction (v22) – even this is for his glory, for the proclamation of his name and that those he saves might see how vast has been God's mercy to them (v17, 22-24).⁵

¹ Calvin speaks of the tree as a sacrament 'that they might assure themselves of [immortality]' (*Instit.* 4.14.18).

² It has been noted by Greg Beale and others that Adam in the garden is described as if he is the high priest in the tabernacle (cf. Ezek. 28:13-14). He fails in his duty as priest, he fails to guard the sanctuary from evil, and so he is cast out. At the end of the Bible, we will be in a greater garden-sanctuary, as a kingdom of priests, purified by the blood of Christ, curse removed, to perfectly worship/serve/enjoy our God, and in that context we will have safe access to the tree of life (Rev. 22:1-5).

³ Note that the lampstand is described as if it is a tree – with branches and buds. Also life and light are very closely associated throughout the Bible (cf. John 1:4).

⁴ This parallel with the Israelites on the verge of the promised land is noted by [Bob Deffinbaugh](#).

⁵ but cf. Matt. 25 where there seems to be an asymmetry between v34 and v41. The Bible's emphasis is on God inviting all and saving the elect while others are left spiritually dead and refuse Christ.

Ephesians 1

- The work of Father, Son and Spirit to bring us to salvation – sovereign grace
- All this is ‘in Christ’ (v1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13). All the spiritual blessings are in Him. Crucially – our election is *in Him* (v4). Predestination is not to be individualised and parcelled out as if it is a thing like a hidden microchip that we either have or have not got. We mustn’t look inward to see if we are elect but rather go to Christ and be in him and find that we are elect there, in Him. For more on this see [here](#).
- All this is to the praise of his glory (v6, 12, 14)
- We are not eternally justified. There is a plan that has to work out through time: We are chosen before creation (1:4-5), the Son came to redeem us at the Cross (1:7), we are born spiritually dead, children of wrath (2:1-3) but, as we hear the gospel, the Spirit regenerates us, connecting us to Christ, making our salvation effectual to us (1:13).

Justification: A quick run through the Bible

Notice the tension that quickly emerges as you read through the Bible...

Gen. 6:9 – a righteous man

Gen. 9:21 – but a sinner

Gen. 14:18 – Abram meets the King of Righteousness

Gen. 15:6 – Abram believes God and it is credited to him as righteousness

Gen. 15:17 – Abram sleeps as God takes responsibility for the covenant

Gen. 18:22-33 – Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? God must punish the wicked and save the righteous

Gen. 19 – Righteous Lot (2 Pet. 2:7) is saved but he doesn’t seem that righteous (Gen. 13:10-13; 19:8, 16)

Psalms 14 – no one is righteous (v1-3) but then who are the ‘righteous’ (v5)?!

Psalms 15 – the description of the righteous one – it doesn’t look like there will be many qualified

Psalms 143 – righteousness as the activity and nature of God (v1, 11), no one living is righteous (v2)

Isaiah 1:21-26 – how will the wicked city become the righteous city?

Isaiah 53:11 – the ‘righteous one’ shall ‘make many to be accounted righteous’ (justified)

Jeremiah 23:6 – the Davidic king will come and his name will be “The Lord our righteousness”

So by the end of the OT the problem is clear – How can the holy, righteous God be the friend of sinners like Noah and Abraham and Lot and David? How can he call them righteous simply because they trust in him and his promises? How can he overlook their sin and not sweep them away with the wicked? But also the solution is starting to become clear...

Luke 23 – the Righteous One is condemned (cf. Acts 3:14)

Rom. 1:17 – the righteousness of God, faith from first to last, this is how the ‘righteous’ could be called righteous in Habakkuk’s day

Rom. 3:9-20 – sums up – both Jews and Gentiles are condemned, unrighteous, the Law only exposes your unrighteousness and increases your guilt

Rom. 3:21-14

- There is a ‘righteousness of God’ which is to be received by faith, as a completely free gift (cf. Phil. 3:9)
- The big problem is the question of v26 - how can God be just (Gen. 18:25) and the justifier of sinners? How could he pass over all these former sins of David etc. and still say he is the

righteous judge? It is a question fundamentally about God’s character and reputation – his ‘name.’ Justification solves our problem but it is more about solving God’s problem.

- The solution is in v25 – propitiation by Christ’s blood. All those former sins (David’s adultery, Moses’ faithlessness etc.), together with all future sins that God would forgive us, were all piled up on the Son of God and punished in his flesh on the Cross (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24). The Law is not overthrown (Rom. 3:31) – sin is punished (in Christ), justice is done, and God can justly say that we are not guilty, our debt has been paid.

Rom. 4:1-8 – this is accounting language

The Great Exchange:

	Christ	Abraham/David/Us
<i>The way of Work</i>		
Working	Perfect obedience, righteousness	Ungodliness, lawless deeds, sin
Due wages	Blessing	Curse
<i>The way of Faith</i>		
Trusting God who justifies the ungodly	Ungodliness, lawless deeds, sin	Perfect obedience, righteousness
Gift	Curse	Blessing

Objection: Deut. 24:16; Ezekiel 18:20 – the righteous must not die for the wicked, everyone is accountable for their own sins, you cannot transfer guilt.

But the Bible shows that there are various ways in which guilt and righteousness can be transferred.

Four Bible illustrations:

1. **Sacrificial substitute or scapegoat** – Lev. 1:4; 16:21-22
2. **Clothing** – Gen. 3:21; Zech. 3:1-5
3. **Marriage** – Gen. 2:24; Psalm 45; Song of Songs 2:16
4. **Tree, branches, fruit** – Gen. 1:9-13 (the third day), v28 (people described like trees); Rom. 5:12-21 (we are guilty because of one man’s sin, we are justified by one man’s righteousness; we don’t go to hell because of our sins or to heaven because of our works, it is a question of which man we are in – Adam or Christ; are we branches of the Adam tree or have we been grafted into the Christ tree (cf. 11:17-24)?); 1 Cor. 15:4 (third day), v22-23.⁶

⁶ Cf. Matt. 12:33 – We sin because we are sinners. It is not our sinning that makes us sinners. Our sin is just the natural fruit of the fact that we are naturally speaking branches of the Adam tree, diseased and poisoned at the root.