

Standing fast in our salvation

Victor Hall

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Chosen for salvation

- In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul gave thanks to God for all those who had heard and received his message. He said that they had been *chosen* by God for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit, and by belief in the truth. This was the salvation to which they had been *called* through the gospel. The gospel of God was proclaimed to them from a presbytery so that they would obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2Th 2:13-14. That is, they would become sons of God and sons of men in the image and likeness of God.
- God has predestined every person to this salvation. By the grace of God that has appeared to all men through the ministry of the cross, we are each given the opportunity to choose our predestination. Tit 2:11. Of course, not every person chooses their calling as a son of God. However, if we do choose what God has chosen for us, we are exhorted by Paul to 'stand fast and hold the traditions' that we are taught from the Scriptures through the preached word. 2Th 2:15.
- In order to stand in this manner, we must be clear about the steps of salvation that were defined by the writers of the New Testament. These are the *traditions* to which we are to hold fast. Our traditions are *not* the theologies and doctrines that have been proposed by historical church figures. In broad terms, these steps of our salvation include justification; being born as a son of God; and salvation through regeneration.

Justification

- Justification is the beginning point of our salvation. Referring to this waypoint, Paul explained that Jesus Christ 'was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised *because of our justification*'. Rom 4:25.
- Our justification is that, through His offering and sufferings, Jesus finished all of the works that belong to every person's sanctification as a son of God. The prophet Isaiah acknowledged this outcome of Christ's offering journey, declaring, 'Lord, You will establish peace for us, *since You have also performed for us all our works*.' Isa 26:12.
- As Jesus accomplished the works that belong to each person's unique name as a son of God, He recorded them in the book of life. Celebrating this wonderful truth, King David wrote, 'My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skilfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth [on the cross, in the sea of God's forgetfulness]. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book *they all were written, the days fashioned for me*, when as yet there were none of them.' Psa 139:15-16.
- By finishing and recording the works that belong to our name as a son of God, Jesus also prepared, in Himself, a heavenly body, or habitation, for each of us. We know this

because, at the last Passover, He said to His disciples, 'Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. *I go to prepare a place for you.* And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.' Joh 14:1-4.

- Jesus justified *every* person who has ever lived. Their name and works were all completed and recorded and were carried with Him to the Father. This is the free gift of righteousness that has been made available through His offering on the cross to those who believe. Celebrating this work, Paul said, 'Through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.' Rom 5:18.
- The implication of this marvellous point is that every person's name is already written in the book of life. This is not on account of anyone's righteousness or their inherent honour, for 'There is none righteous, no not one'. Rom 3:10. Rather, it is on account of our justification achieved by Christ on His offering and suffering journey. We are not endeavouring, therefore, to have our name recorded in the book of life but, rather we are ensuring that it is not blotted out of the book of life. Psa 9:5. Rev 3:5. A person's name is blotted out of the book of life when they accountably reject the ministry of reconciliation that is offered to them through the gospel of God.
- A person obtains their justification by receiving the gift of righteousness. By faith, they are able to reign in life through Jesus Christ. Rom 5:17. This is what it means to be 'justified by faith'. When Paul said that we are 'justified by faith', he was not pronouncing that a person is acceptable to God because they believe in the efficacy of Christ's vicarious offering. Rom 5:1. Rather, he was explaining that a person who receives faith by the hearing of the word of God is joined to Christ, and to the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. Rom 10:17. In this fellowship, they are able to do the works that Christ has already accomplished for them. This is the righteousness of God being lived by His sons!

Born as a son of God

- On the day that Jesus was raised from the dead because of our justification, He appeared to His disciples, declaring to them, '*Peace to you!* As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' Joh 20:21. He then breathed on His disciples, saying to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Joh 20:22. By this means, the disciples were born from above as sons of God. They became a new creation.
- Detailing the process of new birth, the apostle Peter explained that we are 'born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever'. 1Pe 1:23. This is the word of the gospel that is preached by Christ's messengers. 1Pe 1:25. We see that through the preaching of the gospel of peace a hearer is born again of the incorruptible seed of the Father. The seed, which is the word of God, is germinated in the heart of a hearer by the Holy Spirit, who is the life of the seed. Luk 8:11. 1Pe 1:23. Joh 6:63. The believer is born of the *Zoe* life of God and, by this means, receives the divine nature.
- A newborn son of God then dies with Christ in baptism. Baptism is an action of faith that joins a believer to what Christ has already accomplished for them through His offering and suffering journey. That is, through baptism as a son of God, they are identified with the *whole* journey of Christ's baptism through which their sonship

works were finished; they were raised with Him on the third day; and they were waved before the Father as part of the sheaf of firstfruits. As sons of God with a heavenly body, they are hidden with Christ in God. Col 3:3.

- Sons of God are born sinless and remain sinless. We know this, for the apostle John declared, 'Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.' 1Jn 3:9. The life of our sonship is from the Father. It is in Christ who is the immortal Head of His corporate body. He is the Root of the Vine, and we are the mortal branches of the Vine on the earth. We are manifesting the fruit of sonship now, on earth, as we reveal Christ by doing the works that belong to our sanctification, which He has already finished for us.
- Our name and works as a son of God, which Christ has accomplished for us through His offering, are now in Christ, the Root of the Vine. When we are born again, the Father places us in Christ, where we are the branches of the Vine. The life that belongs to our name, which is found in the Root, is ministered to us by Christ, through the Holy Spirit. By this means, we are enabled, in our mortality, to do the works that belong to our sonship as branches on the Vine. We are living a justified life as a righteous, blameless branch.
- It is important to acknowledge that new birth is accomplished within a hearer only *by the Holy Spirit*. As we have already observed, the disciples of Christ were born from above when He said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' This is the first work of the Holy Spirit when He comes into our identity. He also brings with Him the fellowship of the Father and the Son. Once we are born of God by the Spirit, the Father then joins us to Christ and to His offering so that the work of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit can be accomplished in our life.

Saved through regeneration

- The parable of the seed and the grounds teaches us that unless we are joined to a process through which the ground of our heart as sons of men is changed, the seed of the divine nature can die; our sonship can be lost.
- Clearly, we are not saved through new birth alone. Paul was very clear that we are saved through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. He wrote, 'He [God the Father] *saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life'. Tit 3:5-7. This process is the implication of being born of water and of the Spirit, and it is necessary for our *entrance to the kingdom of God*. Joh 3:5.
- Having been born as a son of God through the word of God, and baptised into Christ, the Father makes us a member of *the Son of Man, the last Adam*. That is, we are established as branches of the Vine, being connected to Christ, the Root of the Vine. The Father, through the process of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, tends the branches of the Vine, for He is the Vinedresser. Joh 15:1. He is washing, pruning and purging the branches so that they may bear the fruit of sonship. Any branches who do not bear fruit, because they are unwilling to abide in Christ and participate in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, *He takes away*. Joh 15:6.

- The regeneration of our heart as a *son of man* is initiated as we are washed by the word that proclaims our name as a *son of God*. From this regenerating work achieved by the word, which is the word of our name as a son of God, we are established as a man *in Christ*, the Son of Man and the last Adam. Significantly, regeneration and renewing are realised in our life through *exanastasis*. This is the resurrection life of the Father that was in Christ's blood. We receive this life in our mortal bodies by the Spirit, as we walk in the light of the proceeding word and embrace our daily fellowship in Christ's offering and sufferings.
- This process is necessary for salvation. Although the seed of our sonship is sinless, our human spirit, or identity, needs healing and regeneration in order for the *Zoe* life that belongs to this seed to grow. The seed of our sonship, which is hidden with Christ in God, remains joined to our identity, symbolised as 'dirt' in Jesus' parable, as long as we remain joined to the body of Christ and participate in His offering and sufferings.
- Regeneration and renewing, which belong to this fellowship, are the means by which we obtain 'a noble and good heart' in which the seed of our sonship can be *kept*; and by which we are enabled to *bear fruit with patience*. Luk 8:15. However, the seed of our sonship, which is hidden with Christ in heaven, is separated from our identity on earth when we are disengaged from the body of Christ and from this process. The key point to note is that our generation as man is from Him. When we become Christ's, we are connected to Abraham, our father 'after the flesh'. As the washing of regeneration takes place in our heart, we are being saved as a son of man and glorified as a son of God.
- As we do the works that belong to our name, our heavenly body is being progressively glorified. This is the fruit that is brought forth as we remain connected to Christ and are obedient to His word. The Father, who is the Vinedresser, *harvests this fruit*, and it is built into our heavenly body as *glory*. That is, by faith, that which Christ has finished for us in the hope of our salvation is being made substantial as a glorified, heavenly body. Heb 11:1-2. On the day of resurrection, when the process of our regeneration and renewing is complete, our immortal and incorruptible body, which is from the substance of Christ's physical body, will be clothed with our glorified heavenly body. The glory of this spiritual body will correspond to the level that we have attained in this age. 2Co 5:1-5. Php 3:16.

The impact of regeneration on the ground of our heart

- As we have already considered, the parable of the grounds describes the effect of regeneration and renewing upon the heart of a hearer. The first ground that Jesus identified is *wayside ground*. Significantly, the seed of the word is *sown* in the heart of this hearer. Mat 13:19. However, it does not germinate, because the hearer is unwilling to identify themselves with the baptism of Christ through which their sonship was fulfilled. They demonstrate that they do not understand the word and are unable to be connected, through faith, to their justification. Jesus said that the wicked one snatches away what was sown in their heart.
- *Shallow ground* refers to the heart of a person who hears, receives and chooses their sonship that is proclaimed to them through the gospel of peace. They are born from above and receive a house in heaven. That is, they are hidden with Christ in God. We

could say that they have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Heb 12:22.

- Yet, in coming to Christ, the Chief Cornerstone of the temple of His body, they stumble, being disobedient to the word of their name as a son of God. Mat 13:20-21. 1Pe 2:7-8. Their disobedience is an implication of the attitudes, familiar cultures and personality traits associated with their identity frailties. In order to be glorified as a son of God and made a man in the image and likeness of God, they need to accept the work of regeneration that belongs to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. If they continue to stumble at Christ, maintaining their offence at the word and with the sufferings that they experience because of the word, their sonship and salvation will be lost. Their citizenship will no longer be in heaven.

Growing to maturity

- Through the process of regeneration, we mature as sons of God and sons of men, attaining the stages of growth and development that are necessary for fruitfulness. This fruit is our sanctification, which means that we are obtaining the eternal life that Jesus multiplied to us and is given to us as a gift. Rom 6:22-23.
- Like Paul, the confession of a person who understands and embraces the process of regeneration and renewing is, 'Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.' Php 3:12. We are able to lay hold of what Christ finished for us as we embrace our fellowship in His offering and sufferings as a member of His body. This is because we are obtaining *exanastasis*, or resurrection life in our mortal body! Php 3:10-11. With our mind set on the Spirit, we forget what lies behind, and we reach forward in obedience to fulfil the works of sonship that are proclaimed to us by the word of God. Php 3:13-14. To the degree of regeneration and glorification which we have attained through *exanastasis*, we continue to walk, acknowledging that this is a process that requires patient endurance. Php 3:16. 2Co 3:18.

Walking by the Spirit

- A son of God who is established in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as a member of His corporate body is being led by the Spirit, for the apostle Paul said, 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.' Rom 8:14. This is foundational to the New Covenant. A son of God is able to be led by the Holy Spirit because they receive a new heart and a new spirit when *He* writes His laws upon their heart and mind. Jer 31:31,33. Heb 10:15-16. They are able to do the will of God because they can set their mind on the Spirit, and can remain attentive to what He is saying, rather than continuing to pursue their own initiatives that are 'of the flesh'. Rom 8:6.
- The Holy Spirit initiates the direction and works that we are to do each day. These are the works that belong to our justification in Christ. They are the works that belong to our sonship in heaven, which are fulfilled on earth as we reveal Christ as members of His body. That is, as branches of the Vine, we manifest on earth the works that He already accomplished for us as the Root of the Vine. In this, we are enabled by the Holy Spirit.

- Because we are born of God, we willingly accept the mind of the Spirit and then find capacity for obedience by the power of the Spirit. We accountably proceed to overcome the world by doing the works that belong to our predestination in Christ.
- Note that the capacity to follow the Spirit is because we are born of God, not because we are being regenerated and renewed. However, the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit in our identity give to us levels of attainment in our ability to express the divine nature. We are called to this. This is what it means to be 'a saint'. This is the meaning of 'sanctification'.

In summary

- A word which can give understanding to a hearer is preached by a messenger of Christ. This understanding is the capacity to see the kingdom of heaven. That is, the hearer can see that their sonship was already accomplished in Christ, and they can appreciate what it means to be born again as a son of God.
- The capacity for a hearer to see and understand the implications of the gospel of peace is by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Joh 16:8. Through conviction, they are persuaded that what is being declared to them is *true*. The truth frees them from the delusion of their own understanding as they believe and receive the word proclaiming their name as a son of God, as reality for their life. Joh 8:32. In this regard, they are, by faith, connected to the word that proclaims their sonship. At this point, they have been *born from above to see* the kingdom of God. Joh 3:3.
- In repentance, the believer prays to be *born of water and of the Spirit*. Joh 3:5. The Holy Spirit then moves them beyond conviction and faith, *sealing them as a son of God*. Declaring this waypoint of salvation, the apostle Paul wrote, 'In Him [Jesus Christ] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory'. Eph 1:13-14. When a believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit, they become a temple for the Holy Spirit. 1Co 6:19.
- By the Spirit, the believer's identity is connected to their sonship in Christ Jesus as the Father places them in the body of Christ, where He so desires. 1Co 12:18. The process of salvation commences in their life as they join, through baptism, the offering Christ. In the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, their human identity as a man is being regenerated and renewed by the *exanastasis* life in Christ's blood. Tit 3:4-6. Php 3:9-11. Furthermore, because they are connected to Christ, like a branch connected to the root of a vine, they are enabled to do the works that He has already accomplished for them. By this means, their heavenly body, which is hidden with Christ in God, is being progressively glorified.