The Sovereignty of God

Gods’ Sovereignty In Salvation

In a discussion about God’s Sovereignty in regard to salvation several things must be considered. This matter includes not only the nature of God, but also the nature of man. Since mankind has fallen into sin, it is necessary for Him to be saved, thus the doctrine of Salvation. What follows then is a discussion of how God’s Eternal purpose in Christ to redeem His people from their sins comes about. How is it that redemption takes place, and what are the issues involved as they are described in the Bible. It must be understood that God is not only Sovereign in Creation and in Providence, but also in the application of redemption. All of these things happened according to God’s purpose in Christ.

Matthew 1:21 - "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins. NASB

2 Timothy 1:9-10 - 9 who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, NASB

It is important to understand that the Bible has much to say about this doctrine of Salvation. In order to understand biblical teaching, and because of much false teaching and controversy through the years of Church history, these matters have been broken down into categories which help us to clarify the issues. These include but are not limited to…..

- God’s Nature
- Man’s Nature
- The Nature of Salvation
- The Nature and extent of the Atonement (Christ’s physical death)

These categories exist because of the way the Bible presents the different teachings about salvation.

The Doctrine of Salvation in Church History

There have been many and varied controversies down through the history of the church, not only with the doctrines of salvation, but with all doctrines. This is because of the obvious war against the truth being waged by the enemy of the Church, even Satan himself. This happens chiefly through the diabolical efforts of false teachers, who either, knowingly or ignorantly, distort and pervert the truth.

2 Peter 2:1-2 - 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; NASB

These false teachers take advantage of immature Christians with little knowledge of the Bible. The Bible plainly declares that those who are led away by false teachers are “children” and “barely escaping those who live in error.” It is incumbent then and therefore for Christians not to be led astray from the truth by false teachers and false doctrines, but rather very discerning about it, so as to grow up in their salvation and in the knowledge of God and our precious salvation in Christ.

2 Peter 2:18-19 - 18 For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, 19 promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. NASB
Ephesians 4:14-15 - 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, NASB

However, one great benefit of the controversies caused by false teachers is that it helps the Church to clarify the truth and to closely examine biblical teaching. In examining the doctrine of Salvation in Church history, a brief overview of the major controversies will help us to clearly see the matters at stake, so we can examine the Bible closely to understand its clear teaching.

Pelagius and Augustine

One of the first major controversies on the doctrine of salvation was one introduced by a man named Pelagius. Pelagius was born in England in 354 A.D. and was an ascetic monk there. He later became a popular teacher in the church in Rome. Pelagius was the author of many false teachings summarized below…..

- He denied Original Sin –
  - Mind, will, emotions were not corrupted by the Fall
- Man had natural ability to obey God’s commands
  - Man’s will is not in bondage to sin
  - Man could attain Heaven by good works(salvation was by Law or Gospel)
- Divine Grace is not necessary for Salvation
- Sinless Perfection could be attained
- Present View of Predestination
- Christians can lose salvation

The chief antagonist of the Pelagian doctrines was Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo. Augustine opposed Pelagianism, teaching that man’s nature is corrupted by the Fall, including all of Adam’s progeny, and that man’s will is in bondage to sin, (being dead in transgressions and sin), and that Divine Grace in Regeneration was necessary in Salvation. Augustine taught that Salvation was totally God’s work and that He was due the Glory for it. The chart below pictures the contrast of the two teachings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pelagianism</th>
<th>Augustianism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original Sin</td>
<td>Denied</td>
<td>Affirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Will</td>
<td>Ability to obey perfectly</td>
<td>Inability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Not Necessary</td>
<td>Absolutely necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinless Perfection</td>
<td>Can be attained</td>
<td>Cannot be attained</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pelagianism became a doctrinal system held by many in the early church. But after close scrutiny in many church councils, it was condemned in 416 and 418 at the Councils of Carthage, which assembled to take action concerning the errors of Caelestius, a disciple of Pelagius. It denounced the Pelagian doctrines of human nature, original sin; grace and perfectibility, and fully approved the contrary views of Augustine. Further, the Semi-Pelagian teaching was also condemned as heresy in the second Council of Orange in 529 A.D. The Council of Orange dealt with the Semi-Pelagian doctrine that the human race, though fallen and possessed of a sinful nature, is still "good" enough to able to lay hold of the grace of God through an act of unredeemed human will. The Council held to Augustine's view and repudiated Pelagius. Pelagianism as a structured heretical movement ceased to exist after the 6th century but its essential ideas continue to cause disputes and controversies throughout the history of the Church and even today.