

Series: God Saves #1394

Title: Romans 8.29-30

God Has The Plan

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Welcome back. I am really glad you are here with us. As I continue with our introductory thoughts to soteriology, this great doctrine of salvation, I want to get a running start by, briefly, reminding you about *our* attitude as we approach this mighty and worthwhile task of understanding salvation from God's perspective. I had five insights on attitude last time. These were:

First, like in any family, our Christian family may have disagreements in what we believe about the doctrine of salvation. What interests God is how we handle these disagreements. We want to be respectful to one another and to avoid rancor. Second, and related, the doctrine of salvation really ought to humble us – not puff up our pride! Third, I believe we must approach soteriology in great reverence for God. We must be like Moses at the burning bush. This is very holy ground. We will see the mind of God at work. That we means we must exercise great humility. If we lack humility, let us ask God for it.

Fourth, let us be very careful that we do not approach these doctrines from a purely intellectual, philosophical, and/or theoretical position. To do so is to elevate our minds over the mind of God, and we can never do that. In the words of the 19th century theologian Charles Hodge, "We must conform our theories to facts, and not make the facts conform to our theories (*Systematic Theology, Volume II, 335*)." And by facts he means biblical facts. I agree. I hope you will also.

Fifth, we also must not approach this based on our feelings. There is the intellect, there is the philosopher in all of us, the theories we put forth, but there are also our feelings. Trust me, your *feelings* are bound to get involved in this discussion. In response to what you hear and how you make sense of it, I can hear it now, "but I feel that..." or "but my idea of a loving God is that He would..." Um, it is not our feelings that should drive us. We need to submit what we feel to God, and ask that He bring our emotions under His charge and control. Because here's the reality: God's truth upsets our feelings! It does. There are ways in which holy God ministers that challenge what we *feel* and this is for our good. So, by all means bring along your feelings, but do not decide doctrine based on them.

Let me quote again now from Dr. Hodge. I have mentioned he practiced theological instruction and he did so through his writing and his lectures and leadership of students at the Princeton Theological Seminary in the early to mid 1800s. That was Princeton as it was then, not now, when there has tragically been this departure from holding to the authority of God's Word. In the second volume of his superb *Systematic Theology* first published in 1872 and 1873, the astute professor from Princeton writes, (quoting him now), "It is to be remembered that the question is not which view of the plan of God is the freest of difficulties, the most agreeable to our natural feelings, and therefore the most plausible to the human mind (331)." Unquote.

Notice he emphasizes that as we study soteriology the truth is *not* found in what *we* determine is a) most free of difficulties; the easiest to understand and to accept, b) that which most agrees with our *feelings*, and c) that which is most plausible to our very feeble minds. No! In this study we will have to go into the Scripture and seek, with open minds and hearts, for what are the facts whether we *feel* they are right, whether we agree with them or not. He continues, "We are shut up to facts: the facts of providence, of the Bible...these facts must determine our theory (331)," says Dr. Hodge.

So, here we have some thoughts on our attitude as we begin, and remember these are primarily for you Christians tuning in. This week I have spoken to those of you, friends of ours, who do not (yet) believe in Jesus Christ. And I have spoken to those of you, brothers and sisters of ours, who *do* believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every day I welcome all of you, and others whom you will invite on our journey of discovering who God is. And let us listen as *God* speaks to us through His written Word, this Bible. The Bible is our true source for the doctrine, or the teaching, of how people are saved from our sins by our Savior, Christ.

Continuing on then with our introduction to soteriology and keeping in mind this deals with the purpose of God, according to Romans 8, verse 28, I want to make this statement: God has *the* plan for salvation. God is a planner. He has purposed in His will to redeem us from our sin and He has sent His Son Jesus as our Redeemer, fulfilling His plan and purposes for us. Our current task is to see this plan at work; to make sense of this as best we can given our limitations.

Think of it this way. If you open your door at night and walk out into an open space where there is not too much light pollution, and if you look up into the vast, dark sky even with the naked eye you can see many stars. The moon is there of course and taking residence around the moon are these bright shining lights. When we first look up, if we do not know anything about astronomy, we might assume all is chaos. There is randomness in what we witness. If we come back inside and a family member asked us, "What did you see?" we might say, "Oh I was just looking at the sky, full moon tonight and lots of stars. It's a cloudless night, so lots to see." But when someone trained in the science of astronomy looks up at the night sky and then comes back inside, if asked the same question, he or she will give a very informed, detailed answer as to what they saw. They would describe each star, it's position, their appointed places and orbits, and how all the stars in the universe move together in concert with one another. And they would likely describe this with excitement, awe, and wonder in the tone of their voice. The answer may even prompt us to get off our backside and go outside and look up ourselves.

What the astronomer must admit (he or she may *not* admit it, but nevertheless cannot escape this): God puts the moon and the stars there, says the Bible at the beginning, and God names each star and directs them to exactly where He wants them to be. God has a definite plan for the universe. Similarly, God has a plan, *the plan*, for the spiritual world. And how can we know what this plan is? That's simple. God gave us His blueprint. He spells out His plan with clarity in the Bible. Hodge puts it this way, "We have in theology a guide...we have the Scriptures (315)."

So God has the plan of salvation *and* God has given us this plan. We can know it. It's laid out for us in the Bible. It is of crucial importance that we know this plan. Let me stick with Dr. Hodge and quote him more extensively. This also is found in his second volume on *Systematic Theology*. Quote, "If there be such a plan concerning the redemption of man, it is obviously of the greatest importance that it should be known and correctly apprehended. If in looking at a complicated machine we are ignorant of the object it is designed to accomplish, or of the relation of its several parts, we must be unable to understand or to usefully apply it.

In like manner...the order of the divine decrees, or in other words, the relation in which the several parts of the divine plan stand to each other, is therefore very far from being a matter of idle speculation. It must determine our theology, and our theology determines our religion (314-315)." End of quote.

What is he saying? Well, he is drawing us back to the order of salvation, the *Ordo Salutis*, and what we call the golden chain of salvation. God's plan of salvation is known and correctly apprehended when we look at the various parts in the plan and see how each part relates to all the other parts, or how each link in the chain is interconnected. So, as I have previewed, we will talk about parts like election, predestination, calling, justification, glorification, and more. We will talk about how these work together in the salvation plan of God. And this is not a matter of idle speculation, I love how he says that, *this* determines our theology and then our religion.

God has *the* plan for salvation. And we want to wrap our minds (and hearts) around the plan. Please come along with us as we do just that. And this gives me opportunity to remind you to write to me and to ask for the document *Salvation*. Just write and ask for *Salvation*. I will send you the order of salvation or the golden chain of salvation. That way, you can see clearly exactly what we are talking about. You will see the parts that make up the whole. You will see the various links in the chain. My addresses are forthcoming, so jot them down and send off your email or note today. Just ask for *Salvation*. That's easy. I look forward to hearing from you and to getting this into your hands.

Tomorrow we are going to return to Romans 8, verse 28 and say more about God's purpose. We will explore some other Scripture as well. I hope you will end the week with us. Remember that if you visit our website, godisministry.org, and click on any podcast in this series *God Saves*, you will be able to download and read my manuscript. Just click "read along" on any podcast and everything I have said to you is there for you. Do that and the join us again tomorrow because God Is!

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