

Covenant Redemption

Three Essays by Elder Vernon Johnson, Denton, TX

God: A Respector of Persons

In several verses of scripture in the bible we read where God is "no respecter of persons." But we also read in Gen.4:4, 5, "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." Also we read in Rom. 9:11-13 "(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Thus it is apparent God showed partiality to Jacob over Esau, even as he had showed partiality to Abel over Cain. How can these, seemingly, two competing ideas, that God is no respecter of persons and that God shows respect to persons, be harmonized?

The principle Greek word translated "respect of persons" is "prosopolempsia" meaning "partiality." So the phrase that "God is no respecter of persons" means that God does not show partiality to persons. To reconcile the ideas there must be a way (ways) in which God does not show partiality to persons and a way or ways in which God does show partiality to persons. To understand and harmonize these ideas we must go to the context in which they appear.

First, we will look at those verses of scripture in which it is taught that God is no respecter of persons and see on what basis God does not show partiality:

A. Acts 10:34, 35 - "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Peter said this at the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. Before this, Peter along with the other Jews had thought that God was partial to the Jews, because they were Jews. But God showed Peter that he had a people in every nation. Thus God is not a "respecter of persons" based on nationality.

B. Rom. 2:9-11 - "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God." This shows that God does not shew partiality in reward or punishment based on a person's nationality (Jew or Gentile).

C. Eph. 6:8, 9 - "Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same thing unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him." This shows us that God does not show partiality in judgment based on whether a person is bond or free or whether he is a master or servant. Thus God doesn't favor the master over the servant or the servant over the master.

D. Col. 3:25 - "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." In the verses just prior we read about relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and servants. Thus we must conclude that God is not partial in judgment based on whether we be husband/wife, parent/child, or master/servant.

E. James 2:1, 2 - "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment..." This teaches us that God doesn't value anyone based on their economic status.

F. 1 Peter 1:17 - "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." This teaches us that God is not partial in judging our work. Thus if our work is good, it will be so judged and if it is evil, it will be so judged without partiality to any one over another.

Thus we see that God is not partial in judgment based on ones nationality, economic status, sex, societal position, position in the family, or whether he is bond or free.

In what manner does God have "respect of persons?" Let us now examine four passages that show us on what basis God has respect of some over others:

A. Ex. 2:24, 25 - "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them." Here we see God favoring or being partial to Israel over Egypt based on a covenant he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

B. Lev. 26:9 - "For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you." Once again God is favoring Israel based on a covenant. This time it was the covenant he made with them on Mount Sinai.

C. II Kings 13:23 - "And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet." Again we see God favoring Israel because of his covenant.

D. Ps. 74:19, 20 - "O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever. Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty." The psalmist is calling upon God to favor Zion based on His covenant. Thus we conclude that God shows favor to some over others based on His covenant. It is on the basis of God's covenant of redemption that he was partial to Jacob over Esau and to Abel over Cain.

GOD'S COVENANTS

While time and space will not permit us to go into an exhaustive study of all of God's covenants, we will briefly look at four (4) of the covenants.

The student of the scriptures soon comes to the realization that God is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. God makes two types of covenants. There are the conditional two-sided covenants in which God makes promises that are based on man's obedience to the terms of the covenant. Then there are the unconditional one-sided covenants in which God fulfills all the terms and actions to the benefit of those embraced by the covenant.

The first covenant we read about in the scriptures is the "covenant of the law of sin and death." This covenant was set forth in Gen. 2:16, 17 as follows: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." In this covenant God promised freedom to man to eat of all the trees of the garden but one. As long as man did not eat of the forbidden tree he had the benefits and privileges and provisions of the garden. If, however, he ate of the forbidden tree he would die. Adam as the federal head of all mankind was free to either eat of the tree or not eat of it with attendant consequences. This was a two-sided conditional covenant.

The second covenant we read about is found in Gen. 9:9-17. In this covenant God said that "I establish my covenant with you and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you...neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth." This is a one-sided covenant. All the provisions and terms of the covenant are accomplished by

God. Neither man or any of the creatures are responsible to carry out any of the provisions of the covenant. This covenant is unconditional on man's or the creature's part. This is an unconditional one-sided covenant. Man's actions could in no way alter the outcome of this covenant.

The third covenant we consider is found in Exodus chapter 20 and is known as the "covenant of works" or the "covenant of the law." In Ex. 20:5, 6 we read, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." In verse 8 we read, "And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." In this covenant God gave the people the ten commandments to keep. This was a two-sided conditional covenant. The conditions on the people were that they would obey the commandments of God and enjoy the benefits of the covenant or they would not obey the commandments of God and suffer the curse of the covenant. The consequences and provisions of this covenant were dependent on the actions of the children of Israel. It was obey and be blessed or disobey and be cursed.

The fourth covenant we will consider is found in Rom. 8:28-30, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Please note that this is a one-sided unconditional covenant. All the actions in this covenant are to be performed by God. Man is the recipient of all the benefits of this covenant but his actions in no way alter the outcome of this covenant. This covenant is known as the "covenant of redemption" or the "covenant of grace" as the covenant results in the "redemption" of God's people and it is all by the "grace" of God. There are five actions in this covenant - foreknow, predestinate, call, justify, and glorify. In each of these actions it is God who does the action. Those foreknown are the recipients of the benefits of the covenant. Man's actions do not alter the outcome of this covenant for the same ones foreknown are also predestinated, called, justified and glorified, without the loss of one. Again this is a one-sided unconditional covenant.

God's Covenant of Redemption

In our previous essay we noted that God makes two types of covenants -conditional and unconditional covenants. We also noted that the covenant of redemption as stated in Rom. 8:28-30 is an unconditional covenant, i.e., there are no conditions

placed on man, but God is responsible for carrying out all the actions in that covenant.

Before we study each of the actions in the covenant of redemption listed in Rom. 8:28-30, let us look at an old testament passage that teaches us about the covenant of redemption. This passage is found in II Sam. 23:1-7. This passage begins by telling us that the words that follow are the last words of David. Then it tells us that though the words were spoken by David as his last words, that he was just a mouth-piece for the Holy Spirit, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me and his word was in my tongue." In other words the words spoken were actually the words of the Holy Spirit with David being used as a mouth-piece!

Next, in verse 3 we are told that the Holy Spirit is relating to us a conversation between the "God of Israel" and the "Rock of Israel:" "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me..." Thus in this conversation the Rock of Israel spake to the God of Israel and what followed were the words which the "Rock of Israel" spake to the "God of Israel." I Cor. 10:4 tells us that the "Rock of Israel" is "Christ:" "...for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." Therefore the words that followed in II Sam. 23:3-7 were the words of Christ, the Rock of Israel, to God, the Father, the God of Israel.

In verses 3 and 4 Christ set forth his own requirements to rule as King. Then beginning with verse 5 He relates to us provision of the covenant of redemption. First He says, "Although my house be not so with God..." The Lord's house was composed of sinners. They stood before God condemned by sin. They were not righteous or worthy of eternal glory. Next Christ said "yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant..." Now we see that this covenant was between Christ and God the Father. The covenant was not made with man. While the family of God is embraced by this covenant, they are not parties to this covenant.

The Lord went further and said "ordered in all things and sure..." This covenant between God the Father and God the Son covered all the details. There was nothing left to chance. This covenant is SURE. All the provisions will be carried out just as God ordained them. In addition, the Lord went on: "for this is all my salvation..." This salvation is a salvation that the Lord performs as stated in Matt. 1:21, "he shall save his people from their sins." Notice that when Christ said "all my salvation" that this statement excludes the works of men in bringing it about. It is "all" of the Lord. The Lord went on to say "and all my desire..." God always accomplishes his will: he is never frustrated or disappointed with anything he sets out to do.

Again the Lord said further, "Although he make it not to grow." This covenant neither increases nor decreases in scope or coverage. It results in all its provisions being carried out to its fulfillment and embraces in the end all those who were embraced in the beginning. It neither grows nor diminishes.

Next in v.6 the Lord said, "But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands." The sons of Belial are representative of our sins. The fact that they cannot be taken with hands illustrates our helplessness in attempting to do any thing to save ourselves from sin. All of our works are as filthy rags before God. Finally, the Lord said, "But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place." Who was it that was "fenced with iron and the staff of a spear?" It was Jesus who was nailed to the cross with iron nails through his hands and his feet and who at the end had a spear driven through his side. It was he and he alone that could deliver and did deliver us from our sins. Fire is a figure of God's judgment found often in the scriptures. In the same place where Christ was crucified were our sins utterly burned with the fire of God's judgment. They were completely burned with "fire in the same place." Since our sins were utterly burned, then there is nothing left for the sinner to do to be made righteous before God's bar of justice. According to this everlasting covenant of redemption Christ has delivered us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He has delivered us from our sins. Praise be to his Holy name.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28)

Rom. 8:28-30 is commonly called the "Covenant of Redemption." In our next essay we will consider the "all things" that "work together for good." In this essay we will look at the "purpose" of God. Verse 28 above speaks of those who "love God" "who are the called according to his purpose."

Chronologically, God purposed to call a people, then he called those he purposed to call, and then as a consequence of this calling they love God. No man loves God before he is called of God. According to 1 John 4:7, "everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." God's calling is the "cause," the new birth is the "effect," and love of God is the "consequence."

God is a God of purpose. He does not work his will based on chance or happenstance. He purposes to do something, then he does according to his purpose. The scriptures speak of the purpose of God thusly:

A. Isa. 46:11 - "I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it."

B. Eph. 3:11 - "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

C. Eph. 1:9 - "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself."

D. Eph. 1:11 - "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the council of his own will."

E. II Tim. 1:9 - "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

F. Rom. 9:11 - "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth..."

From the above we make the following observations about God's purpose:

A. What God purposes to do, he does. According to Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4:35, "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" No force in heaven and earth can stop or hinder God from doing what he has purposed to do. Once God purposes to do something, it WILL be done.

B. God had an eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus. Mortal time bound man has a difficult time understanding something that is eternal, i.e., has no beginning or no end. Yet what God has purposed in Christ Jesus has no beginning and has no end. It is infinitely old and will last an eternity. The Covenant of Redemption expresses God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus.

C. God's purpose is his good pleasure. It pleased God to choose, save, call and glorify a people to be his.

D. God purposed our eternal inheritance.

E. In God's purpose, he councils only with himself, he does not council with anyone else. Of course, when you have all wisdom and all knowledge there is no reason to council with anyone else!

F. God works all things after the council of his own will. God does not have to alter anything according to changed circumstances. The God who has all power and all knowledge can and does purpose according to his will and then executes his purpose without change or need of change.

G. Our salvation from sin and our holy calling is according to that which God purposed in Christ before the world began. God purposed to save us and God purposed to call us. Now, here in time he executes his purpose. He saves us and he calls us. Thus our salvation and calling are not by chance or happenstance, but by God's eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

H. God purposed to choose a people to be his and according to Eph. 1:4 he chose them before the world began. His choice was not based on works but was by grace.

To be able to purpose something, then bring it about exactly as he purposed it, speaks of God's wisdom, power, knowledge, and character. As one old testament verse states "I am God, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." God purposes and never changes from that he purposes. He does according to his purpose and it comes to pass just exactly as He purposed it.

In the Covenant of Redemption God purposed to foreknow, predestinate, call, justify, and glorify a people. The end result is that they are chosen, predestinated, called justified, and glorified just as God purposed. As a side note, we love God because he called us. The fact that we love God is evidence we are embraced in this Covenant of Redemption.

Part Two

Rom. 8:28-30 is commonly known as the "Covenant of Redemption." It is an unconditional covenant that God made with himself to procure the salvation, new birth, and glorification of those he foreknew.

The statement at the beginning of this passage has been a subject of much discussion and controversy in religious circles through the ages. This statement causing controversy is "All things work together for good to them that love God." The controversy revolves around the meaning of the word "all." Is the "all" in this passage a universal "all" or a contextual "all?" All can be universal, i.e., embracing everything without exception or it can be contextual, i.e., embracing only those things within the context. If the "all" is universal, then the statement would teach that everything that ever happens whether good or bad ultimately works together for good to them that love God. If, however, the "all" is contextual then the statement would be referring only to the things within the

context, i.e., God's foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. Using the contextual "all" would teach only that "all" refers to the above five things and these five things are working together for good to them that love God.

Sometimes, I hear people make the statement after something good has happened to someone that "all things work together for good to them that love God." I, personally, have never heard anyone say that after something bad had happened to someone!

Now, if the "all" in "all things" is universal then all sins, evil, the devil, his angels, and every catastrophe as well as everything else that happens in the universe would work together for good to them that love God. For the all to be universal there could be no exceptions. Since the above listed things such as sin, evil, the devil, his ministry, and catastrophes don't on the surface appear to be working together for our good, God is assigned the responsibility of controlling those things in such a way that ultimately they work together for good for those who love God. Usually the passage where Joseph told his brethren, who sold him into Egyptian slavery, is quoted, "ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good," to attempt to substantiate a universal "all" things.

When in doubt about the meaning of God's word, our best course of action is to let the scriptures speak as to the meaning. Rom. 3:7, 8 reads, "For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? Whose damnation is just." Paul said it was a slander for anyone to report that he or those with him said "Let us do evil that good may come." Now if my or anyone else's evil deeds result in good to them that love God, then why did Paul say it was a slander? Thus it would appear that the universal "all" theory does not stand up under the scrutiny of God's word.

Now all this is not to say that sometimes God providentially intervenes in our lives and turns "lemons into lemonade." This has happened, no doubt, many times in the lives of his people, but this doesn't justify saying that God will take every evil and every sin that is ever committed and make each of them work for our good.

My conclusion is that the "all" in Rom. 8:28 is a contextual "all" and that everything about God's fore-knowing a people, having predestinated them to be conformed to the image of Christ, calling them, justifying them and glorifying them works together for our good. Paul concludes in v. 31, "What shall we

then say to "these" things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" The "these things" are the "five things" in v. 29 and 30 which are the "all things" in v. 28.

Before proceeding to notice how and why the five things in Rom. 8:29, 30 in the covenant of redemption work together for good to them that love God, let us notice that the five things listed in those verses are all listed in the past tense - foreknew, predestinated, called, justified, glorified. Now we know that from a timely standpoint we were not all called at the time this was written, nor are we yet conformed to the image of Christ as we will be, nor are we completely glorified in the sense that we will be according to this covenant. How then can we explain how the past tense verbs can be used? The answer is found for us in Rom. 4:17, "(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickened the dead, and calleth those things that be not as though they were." God can call things that be not as though they were because what God purposes to do must be done! Since the covenant of redemption shows us God's eternal purpose, He is justified in using the past tense though to us some of those things are yet future. Remember, what God purposes to do is as good as done.

Next, we want to consider the good that those five things work together. The end result of those five things are all eternal good for those whom God foreknew. Now there is much timely good that comes to us during our lifetime, such as providential blessings, growth in spiritual knowledge, fellowship with God and his people, true worship of God, etc. These and many more are timely blessings and certainly can be classified as good to us and for us. However, the good in the covenant of redemption transcends timely blessings and speaks to us of eternal good. First, we will be conformed to the image of Christ and that conformation is for an eternity. Second, the result of God's calling is that we are born again, and that spiritual birth gives us eternal life in the spirit. Third, our justification from sins places us in a righteous position with God that can never be altered. Fourth, our glorification in body, soul, and spirit is eternal.

Now let us proceed to consider how those five things - foreknew, predestinated, called, justified, glorified - work together for that eternal good to those that love God. Please note the unity of effect that those five things have. This is noted through the use of the pronouns, whom and them. For when the scripture says "whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate...and whom he did predestinate, them he also called..." we note the absolute unity of action and effect upon the ones being acted upon. In other words, the same ones that God foreknew are the exact same ones that he predestinated, and the exact same ones that he called, and the exact same ones that he justified, and the exact same ones that he

glorified. There are not more or less that he foreknew than he predestinated or more or less that he predestinated than he called, etc. Thus he foreknew the same number of people that he also predestinated, called, justified and glorified. The effect upon us individually is that once he foreknew us, he also did predestinate us, and in the mind and purpose of God, he called us, justified us, and glorified us. Thus if I am the beneficiary of one of the actions of God in this covenant then I am a beneficiary of all five of the actions in this covenant. Thus they all work together for our eternal good.

But why is it that they all work together? The answer is because the action is all of God. None of the things listed in this covenant requires any action on man's part. The covenant speaks of whom God foreknew and of whom God predestinated, and of whom God called, and of whom God justified, and of whom God glorified. This is the reason why those five things work together. It is all in keeping with God's eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is why there can be no failure in this covenant. It is an unconditional covenant, that is, there is no conditions placed on man to perform in order for the provisions of this covenant to be carried out. All of the provisions will be carried out by God. No wonder the writer could say in verse 31, "what shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" One might be tempted to say, "Well the devil and all the fallen angels are against us, as well as the messengers of Satan, and a wicked world." But it doesn't matter who might attempt to oppose us, for God is for us and he has all power in heaven and in earth and none can stay his hand or say unto him, what doest thou. God is greater than all the combined forces of all creation and God will bring to pass what he purposes to do. God cannot fail or be discouraged. We can rejoice in the knowledge that those five things in his covenant of redemption work together for our eternal good, because God is the one who is working the covenant.