

PAUL'S CONCEPT OF SALVATION AS A NEW RELATIONSHIP:
A STUDY IN EPHESIANS 2:19-22

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ABSTRACT

God's quick response to the doom and ruin mankind brought upon itself was the restoration of man's position in the original plan of God through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary and its attendant implication. The contemporal Christians experience salvation at a superficial level; there is more to the salvation they claim to have. The ignorance of this is the reason Christians does not fully appropriate the essence of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ unfortunately, to their detriment. The question is that where do we as Christians stand in Christ after professing Him as Lord and Saviour? The answer to this will assist believers to understand the extend God saved them. Without this knowledge, salvation will be handled in a way that does not portray the reason God establishes it.

An Exegetical analysis of Ephesians 2:19-22 and the consultation of related materials are employed in this essay to explore the essence of the work of Christ in saving mankind so that contemporary Christians might appropriate their salvation in Christ. To this end, individual Christians, pastors and the church at large will know where they stand in Christ. The analysis shows that God saves mankind to restore him into the fellowship he lost in Eden to disobedience through Adam. Man is adopted in the family of God releasing the potentiality of been holy on him. The writer concludes that God wrought salvation on man to bring him into an intimate relationship with Himself. Thus the church must constantly and consistently seek to rediscover and grasp the biblical understanding of salvation and practice it the way Paul has prescribed in addition to other New Testament writers.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The covenant of redemption is a mutual compact between the father and the son in reference to the salvation of man. This is a subject which, from its nature, is entirely beyond human comprehension. The covenant between the father and the son

was formed in eternity and revealed in the New Testament time. Christ speaks of the promises made to Him before His advent and of His coming into the world in executing the commission which He had received from the father. Christ came, therefore, in execution of a purpose of God, to fulfill a work which has been assigned Him (John 17:4); that is, the salvation of mankind.

The salvation of Israel was the plan of God to have a nation and a people, to Himself as His beloved to whom He can relate with. This started from Abraham whom God called out of His people to Himself. It can be inferred from this concept that God is a God of relationship. God initiated the salvation of Israel to make her a people unto Himself. From this concept also, it can be concluded that salvation is a covenant that involves a mutual relationship with those involved. God saved Israel and made a covenant relationship with her.

From the text analyzed, the Gentiles had a life and status before coming to the saving knowledge of Christ. They were people separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship of Israel and foreigners to the covenant of the purpose without hope and without God in the world (Eph 2:13 NIV). The phrase "without God" implies, to have nothing to do with God. They were people who are not in any good relationship with their creator. They were ignorant of Him, and do not trust Him or obey His command. They can be likened to people who apostle Paul referred to as "being veiled" indicating a sign of perishing and people the god of this age has blinded their mind as unbelievers (2Cor. 4:3-4). The Gentiles had no understanding of whom God is, therefore, had nothing to do with Him. They were idolaters; sinners in every respect.

Nonetheless, God did not shut the door of grace at them. He initiates their salvation by making available the saving knowledge of Christ through the teaching of the apostles and prophets. He also prompted their acceptance of this saving grace and

thus, their status changed through their faith in Christ. They are no more separated from Christ, no more excluded from the citizenship of Israel, no more foreigners to the covenants of the promise, no more without hope and God in the world. Those who were once far away has, now in Christ, been brought near through the blood of Christ. Jesus Christ became their peace, destroyed the barrier, pull down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations, reconciling them to God. Through Him they gained access to their creator whom they were separated from initially.

Consequently, they were no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with holy people and members of the household of God. They became a member and part of the universal building of God's holy children that is having the foundation of the apostles and prophet in which Christ Himself is the cornerstone. They now consist in the temple that grows into holy temple, a place God dwells in all His Holiness by his Spirit. This new status is a function of the Gentile's acceptance of God's provision of salvation in Christ Jesus.

It takes relationship for the Gentiles to be with Christ. It takes relationship for them to be citizens and members of the family of God. It takes also relationship to have direct access to God. No one can enjoy God by been an alien to Him. The Bible records that the prayer of sinners is an abomination to God. This means God cannot commune with a person that has not died to sin and accepted Jesus Christ (who is the agent of salvation) as Lord and Saviour. No one can be in relationship with God without accepting the salvation Christ wrought for mankind. Christ brings us into a far better relationship than the one enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the fall and even better than that with Abraham and other Old Testament saints. As the death of Christ washes off our sins making us holy before God, His perfect live of obedience earns us

righteousness. The same that Adam did not have and the one that the Old Testament fathers of faith obtained through their works. Christ's righteousness was imputed into mankind and God sees us as been righteous before Him. We did not work for it. By this Christ brought us into a better relationship with God.

At this juncture, it can be concluded that sin leads to the dethronement of man from the height God had formerly established him. Sin brought mankind down from the height where God can relate with him. Man came down from the height of perfect relationship he had enjoyed with God. It is this height God intends to bring humanity back to, through the reconciliatory work of Christ. Salvation plan was aimed at bringing back mankind into the glory of the fellowship with God that was lost through disobedience in the Garden of Eden. This was the grace that was made available to the Gentiles. At their acceptance, of the gift of salvation through Christ Jesus, the Gentiles were reconciled to God; they were brought back into fellowship with God. They are no longer foreigners and aliens, no longer excluded from the benefit of children as members of God's family. They now have a relationship with their creator.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above conclusion, the writer provides some recommendations hereunder. These suggestions are to help enhance salvation and to ensure that it is appropriated as it should be.

The church should return to the concept of the original nature of the New Testament church, where membership is determined by salvation experience (Act 2: 47). Membership of a church should not be based on attendance but on saved and

disciplined members. The church should therefore put in place thorough and proper church membership enlistment programme.

Discipleship should be the church priority. It is commonly known as foundation class, membership class, believers' class, or follow up. It should be aimed at making a person to become like Christ, nurturing members and bringing them to maturity in faith. This can be enhanced by the following activities of the church: House or cell fellowship, Discipleship programmes, Bible study, Prayer meeting, Sermons and discussion, Sunday school, Enquirers class, Church Training Programmes, Specialize group activities and Counseling. It should be noted that many churches make wrong use of these activities by using them as a means for numerical church growth. These ministries of the church should be used and are meant to be use for nurturing members to maturity in faith. The church must not place discipleship with counseling as in evident today. Moreso, discipleship programmes should be a continuous exercise.

The pastor's salvation experience, aligned with his ways of life, should be the criteria for calling any pastor to any church. It is generally believed that no man can give above what he has, or in another sense, no one can give what he does not have. A minister with questionable salvation experience cannot lead sinners unto the salvation he never has. The man of God should understand the mind of God for the church. These enhance leading the church according to the owner's desire. The owner of the church is God in Christ Jesus and He always desire to lead His flock in His own way. Because of the nature of the church, God always dares to determine who will lead or pastor a particular church. The church should therefore endeavour to seek the counsel of the Holy Spirit on calling a pastor. This is against familiarity, relational and political method used by most of the churches today. Furthermore, according to

Apostle Paul in the focal text, ministers are foundations upon which the building of the body of Christ is built; therefore, salvation messages should be given the right priority and preached in the right concept above all other subjects that are common on the pulpit today.

The church must from its inception inculcate into her polity discipleship materials designed primarily for restoration process, at all levels of church membership in case of any erring members. Since no one is a spiritual giant. The church should monitor and maintain the salvation of her members through constant renewal programmes, and pastoral care. From this the erring members can be discovered and restored.

The church must constantly and consistently seek to rediscover and grasp the biblical understanding of salvation and practice it the way Paul has prescribed in addition to other New Testament writers. For proper awareness and enlightenment Christian scholars and theologians should write biblically based and theologically sound study materials on this and other related topics. This brings about the right information to people on what salvation is all about and how to appropriate it to have a better and more intimate relationship with God. This is the original plan of God for saving mankind.

In order to maintain unity in the church, ministers should not have caucus as these promote disunity in the church. Every member should be treated the same way. Pastors should not seek favouritism or prefer one member at the expense of the other. Unity in the church enhances the ministerial work of the church to be aimed at meeting the spiritual needs of the congregation and building members into maturity (Eph 4:11-14). The goal of the work of the pastor is to preach, disciple and send out disciples to disciple others.

For the pastors, a spiritual renewal programmes and courses in inevitable. This enhances the pastor's spiritual growth and thereby also increases the spiritual fervency of the church at large. Ministers of God should be encouraged to have counselors who are senior colleagues in the field for spiritual relationship, strengthening and oversight. The teaching of the pastor should separate salvation from the reward of our religious activities as many preached. God rewards our work but our duty and religious activities do not earns us salvation. We are saved by grace.