

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Book of Acts

Lesson 7. Paul's First Missionary Journey

If you are thoroughly human, no doubt you have at times wondered if God has elected you to be saved. You know you need a Saviour; and you know that lots of people are going to be lost. There are sincere Christians who actually believe that God elects some to be saved and others to be lost. A text that *appears* to support that idea is Acts 13:48. Paul has been preaching the gospel on his first missionary journey to Antioch. Then Luke says: "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (*King James Version*). The *New International Version* says the same: "All who were appointed for eternal life believed."

It sounds like discouraging bad news for those who are not so "appointed" or "ordained." Some dear people actually give up in discouragement; they tell themselves, "It's too hard; youth say, temptation is too strong; I am sure God has not ordained me to be saved; He hasn't 'appointed' me." Calvinists actually use this text to support their doctrine of double predestination.

But the Greek verb doesn't say what the KJV and NIV say. It is *tetagemnoi* which is a reflexive form of the verb for "appoint" which means that the translation should read, "As many as appointed themselves for eternal life believed." In other words, they heard Paul preach the good news; they said to themselves, "Hey, I want that! That's for me! I'm going to latch on to this preaching of Paul!" Once they made that decision, then immediately their hearts began to be melted, they learned to appreciate the cross of Christ that Paul was preaching, "they believed."

This has to be the correct understanding according to the context. In verse 46 Paul addressed the Jews who chose not to believe: "Seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves as unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." What they did was the opposite of what the believers did. It's the same idea, only in reverse. Those who believed were not acting out a preprogrammed agenda determined for them before the foundation of the world (Calvinist "predestination"); they took the truth to themselves, grabbed it, "judged themselves" to be favored of God with the gospel.

So, grab every ray of light that comes your way; don't wait a moment; "I made haste, and delayed not," says David (Psalm 119:60). If you're smart, you'll always grab a bargain the moment you see it. The idea is not that God preaches the gospel indifferently, or only once in a while. The problem is that your own heart can become dull and dilatory and unresponsive. Believe the good news now; everything that God has promised is for *you*.

The gift is given to “whosoever will” receive it (Rev. 22:17). It includes the forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:38-39), and the faith to believe that they have been forgiven. God’s forgiveness is not a temporary “pardon” which says that He doesn’t mind if we sin again—no; if God forgives us a sin it means that we will never do it again.

The breakthrough insight of the 1888 message is that “through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:38). Writing of Jesus’ healing the palsied man E. J. Waggoner writes: “They made a change in the man, and that change was permanent. Even so it must be in the forgiveness of sin. The common idea is that when God forgives sin the change is in himself, and not in the man. It is thought that God simply ceases to hold anything against the one who has sinned. But this is to imply that God had a hardness against the man, which is not the case. God is not a man; he does not cherish enmity, nor harbor a feeling of revenge. It is not because he has a hard feeling in his own heart against a sinner that he forgives him, but because the sinner has something in *his* heart. God is all right,—the man is all wrong; therefore God forgives the man, that he also may be all right.” [1]

Forgiveness there is far more than mere pardon; forgiveness takes the sin away. Forgiveness imparts in the place of the sin (that was there) a divine-born hatred of the sin itself.

Included in that most precious gift is heart-reconciliation with the Father; He is now working to effect that reconciliation, for we read in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that “God was [is] in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.”

Forgiveness includes that reconciliation of heart with the Father, “in Christ.” That is, we have come to believe (even if we have not yet learned to understand) that we now hate the sin itself; there is no resentment left in the heart against the Father. Even the pain and suffering of a love betrayed and lost (which embitters us) is healed by this “peace” that the Savior gives—not merely offers.

Almost the last words that Jesus spoke to “us” as He was being taken up in His ascension into heaven were: “Peace be unto you” (Luke 24:36). That was not an idle greeting; He gives that peace—not merely offers it. Such “peace” is the opposite of worry or fear; in fact it’s an antidote to worry and fear!

Miracle of miracles! A wounded heart is healed by the “peace” that Jesus gave as His last bequest at His ascension. Yes, there has been suffering, for the “peace” that Jesus gives would not be appreciated unless we had tasted it; “unto you it is given ... not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29).

“Given unto [us]!” Yes! A “gift” of suffering to make you happy in the day when Jesus comes; and you’re happy even now thanking Him for it, in advance.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnote:

[1] E. J. Waggoner, "The Power of Forgiveness," *Signs of the Times* (April 10, 1893), p. 355.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/iE02Whkw52I>

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