

## God's Delight in Himself Alone

*The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, by John Piper. Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2000.

Drawing upon the Scriptures and the writings of Henry Scougal and Jonathan Edwards, John Piper, a former professor of theology at Bethel College and the current senior pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, presents a portrait of God in *The Pleasures of God* (hereafter, *Pleasures*) by probing various aspects of His pleasure. With pastoral tenderness, theological discipline, readable style, and a sound biblical foundation, Piper asserts that from the fountain of God's happiness in His unique Son flows His work of creation, election, and redemption in order that we may share in His happiness for our satisfaction in Him and for the manifestation of His glory. Penned by a seeker and lover of God, *Pleasures* offers refreshing insights into the believers' right to enjoy God by meditating on the Bible with prayer. Against the prevalent trend of anthropocentric theology that typically begins with and centers on transient human desires and needs, Piper's theocentric theology admirably maintains its focus on the eternal God and His pleasure. Despite its sustained focus on God's pleasure, *Pleasures* still comes short of penetrating to the core of the heart's desire of the Triune God—His desire to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people for the purpose of making them His corporate expression in Christ. This shortcoming rests both upon the book's neglect of the prominent place humanity occupies in God's eternal purpose as the means of His manifestation and upon its incomplete understanding of the intrinsic being of the Triune God as an eternal dispensing. Had *Pleasures* probed God's yearning to reproduce His Son in humanity for His enlarged expression and explored the organic implications of His eternal triune being, it would have presented a fuller revelation of God's pleasure as unveiled in the Bible: namely, God's delight both in His individual expression—Christ as the only begotten Son of God—and in His corporate expression—Christ as the firstborn Son of God with the believers as the many sons of God.

### God's Pleasures Presented in *Pleasures*

In the introduction, the author tells us that his book owes its genesis to Henry Scougal's statement in *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*: "The worth and excellency of a

soul is to be measured by the object of its love" (18). Applying this statement to God, Piper contends that the pleasures of God are the measure of the excellency of His soul. In other words, to see the excellency, greatness, and glory of God is to meditate on His joy, happiness, and pleasures. Since every pleasure of God is "another feature in the glory of his countenance," Piper regards *Pleasures* as "a vision of God through the lens of his happiness" (21). His hope in writing the book is that people would meditate on the pleasures of God to become "increasingly satisfied with God and changed gradually into his likeness" for the manifestation of God's glory in the world "through the mission of his church" (21).

This revised and expanded edition of Piper's 1991 book consists of ten chapters, each of which portrays a distinct facet of God's happiness. They are divided into two sections. In the first section, the author portrays the pleasure of God in His Son (chapter one), in all He does (chapter two), in His creation (chapter three), in His fame (chapter four), in election (chapter five), and in bruising the Son (chapter six). In this cluster of chapters, Piper considers God's joy in His own perfections and self-sufficiency. From eternity, God has been "supremely happy in the fellowship of the Trinity" (21), delighting in His Son as the image of His own perfections with the Spirit of love flowing between them (Col. 1:15). From this "self-replenishing joy" of the Trinity (22), God's enjoyment of His Son flows into us by the Holy Spirit so that we share in the very pleasure that the Father has in the Son (John 17:26). Since God acts only out of such an overflow of His boundless self-sufficiency, He is never under constraint by forces outside Himself to act contrary to His good pleasure. Thus, He enjoys His sovereign freedom to do all His pleasure, for His acts are but the expression of His pleasure (Psa. 135:6). For instance, He rejoices in creating the universe because His creation praises Him and expresses His glory, revealing His incomparable power and wisdom (104:31). He also delights in spreading the fame of His name throughout the world because He loves to be known for who He really is (1 Sam. 12:22). God's passion for His fame must motivate us to spread His fame to all the unreached people of the world. Furthermore, He delights in choosing with His unconditional sovereignty who will be saved because this election humbles sinners and exalts the glory of God (Deut. 10:14-15). His election offers hope for effective evangelism and guarantees the eventual triumph of Christ's great mission. Moreover, God delights in bruising

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His Son on the cross because by His redemptive death Christ saved sinners to glorify the Father (Isa. 53:10).

Whereas the first six chapters focus on God's pleasure in His own nature and work, the last four chapters shift the focus toward His pleasure in the attitudes and actions of His people. In the second section, Piper describes the pleasure of God in doing good to all who hope in Him (chapter seven), in the prayers of the upright (chapter eight), in personal obedience and public justice (chapter nine), and in concealing Himself from the wise and revealing Himself to infants (chapter ten). In this group of chapters, the author examines how we sinners can please a holy God. God takes pleasure in doing good to those who fear Him and hope in Him, for their fear reflects the greatness of His power, and their hope, the bounty of His grace (Psa. 147:10-11). In turn, the human response of hope comes to verbal expression in prayer and active expression in obedience. God delights in those who pray with an upright heart because prayer satisfies the wants of our soul while magnifying the wealth of God's glory (Prov. 15:8). His pleasure in prayers is intimately associated with His passion for the spread of His fame—the spread of His Word throughout the earth—because “prayer is the power that wields the weapon of the Word” (221). Thus, the believers are charged to pray with a global wartime mentality to engage in spiritual warfare for the triumph of His Word in every people, tribe, tongue, and nation. God also delights in personal obedience, for our obedience is the obedience of faith, which is itself the fruit of our delight in Him (1 Sam. 15:22). Finally, God takes pleasure in concealing Himself from the wise—those who boast in their self-sufficiency and rely on their natural intelligence—and in revealing Himself to infants—those who recognize their helplessness and depend on Christ as the way to wisdom (Luke 10:21). This is because “God's goal in creation and redemption is to humble the pride of man and exalt the glory of his grace” (281). Hence, knowing God requires not only serious reflection with the mind but also God's immediate supernatural revelation, which is reserved for humble infants.

Piper rightly underscores the believers' need to enjoy God as their supreme delight, echoing a central theme of his previous work, *Desiring God*. He writes in *Pleasures*, “One must savor God as the most excellent of all beings. That is what this book is about” (12). For Piper, the “pre-eminent” sentence in the first edition of the book that shapes his “present burden for the church and the world” is the following: “Grace is the pleasure of God to magnify the worth of God by giving sinners the right and power to delight in God without obscuring the glory of God” (11). Piper is convinced that “savoring the supremacy of God in his own affections and in ours is utterly crucial for the strength of the church and the suffering required to finish the great commission” (11). Prizing joy in God as

the “greatest joy,” Piper admirably highlights the believers' right to enjoy God, a truth dear to God's heart and central to the divine revelation but neglected, and even spurned, by a great many believers (282).

Piper's realization of the import of savoring God also shapes his definition of faith: “The essence of faith is being satisfied with all that God is for us in Christ” (247). What satisfies us is not merely the promises of God but all that God Himself is for us. Hence, according to the book, “What faith embraces most earnestly is not just the reality of sins forgiven (as precious as that is) but the presence of the living Christ in our hearts and the fullness of God himself (Ephesians 3:17-19)” (247). Moreover, Piper declares that faith is not just intellectual assent—it is “the quenching of the soul's thirst at the fountain of God” (247). Citing John 6:35, 4:10, 14, and 7:37-38, the book identifies believing in Jesus as coming to eat and drink the bread of life and the living water “which are nothing other than Jesus himself” (248). Piper thus concludes that the meaning of faith is that “when we eat this food and drink this water we are satisfied with Jesus” (248). To his credit, Piper's conception of faith goes beyond the realm of absolutism from sin and rational assent and touches on the subjective enjoyment of Christ Himself as food and drink.

*Pleasures* also offers a balanced exhortation to know God by reading His written Word and praying for His revelatory work in us. Rightly critiquing pragmatism and subjectivism as lacking the reality of objective truth, Piper contends that the purpose of the mind is “not to rationalize subjective preferences, but to recognize objective reality and to help the heart revel in God” (261). For Piper, true knowledge of God comes through two media: divine spiritual light—that is, God's supernatural self-revelation—and our disciplined labor on the objective written Word of God. Recognizing a reciprocal effect between these two media, Piper says, “Learning to pray and learning to read are both essential” (288). Piper underscores man's absolute impotence to obtain knowledge of God apart from His gracious self-revelation. He thus quotes Luther's three rules regarding theology: “prayer, meditation, trial,” as well as his instruction regarding the importance of prayer: “That the Holy Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent is most certain. Therefore your first duty is to begin to pray, and to pray to this effect that...He very graciously grant you a true understanding of His words” (291). Lamenting the dearth of references to God in so many Christians' academic works, Piper echoes Jonathan Edwards in contending that since all Christian scholarship is rooted in spiritual sight and requires a spiritual taste for God, to engage in Christian scholarship one must be born again and thereby savor the beauty of God's nature. This observation is a much-needed indictment of the current state of so-called Christian scholarship, which is characterized

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by an excess of rationalistic intellectualism and a paucity of the pure divine revelation.

### God's Good Pleasure Revealed in the Bible

In spite of *Pleasures'* many strengths, it suffers from several shortcomings that limit the biblical revelation of God's good pleasure. First, *Pleasures* neglects the crucial place humanity occupies in God's eternal purpose. Though correctly underscoring God's pleasure in His Son as the reflection of His perfections, the book falls short of underlining God's pleasure in humanity as the means of His manifestation. The Bible reveals not only the preeminence of the Son in the Godhead but also the prominence of humanity in God's heart (Psa. 8:3-6). With respect to His eternal existence, God delights in His Son, the second in the Godhead, who exists in the form of God and expresses God as the image of God (Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15). But with regard to His eternal economy to enlarge His expression through creation, God longs to reproduce His Son in humanity as His enlarged corporate manifestation.

### God's Pleasure in His Creation of Humanity

*Pleasures* briefly touches on the importance of humanity in God's creation, saying that "the root of [God's] delight in creation has to do with imaging forth his own glory, because only after he created man and woman *in his image* did God add the word 'very' to the word 'good.'" (82). Yet the book fails to reveal the intrinsic significance of God's delight in creating humanity in His image from the standpoint of the apostles' teaching in the New Testament. Paul declared that Christ, the Son of God, is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15); he also wrote that according to His purpose, God predestinated His chosen people to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29). Juxtaposing Colossians 1:15 and Romans 8:28-29 with Genesis 1:26 suggests that from the perspective of the New Testament revelation, God's delight in creating humanity in His image stems from His desire that a great many human beings, chosen before the foundation of the world and created according to the image of His Son in time, would be conformed to the image of His Son to become His corporate reproduction and His expanded expression (Eph. 1:5). From the creation of humanity to the culmination of the New Jerusalem, the entire Bible abounds with intimations that God's thought is focused and His heart is set upon humanity, for it is humanity that fulfills God's heart's desire for His corporate duplication and expression.

### God's Pleasure in the Humanity of Christ

Perhaps as a consequence of overlooking this biblical revelation, the book on the whole overemphasizes the divinity of Christ to the neglect of His humanity. To be fair, *Pleasures* attempts to portray God's delight in becoming a man in a span of three pages (34-36). Citing Colossians 2:9, John 1:14, and Luke 1:34-35, the book admirably asserts that God "clothed the fullness of deity with a virgin-born human nature, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the God-Man, in whom 'the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily'" (35). Further, the book should be commended for claiming that "when God the Father and God the Son engaged to unite deity and humanity in Jesus, the Father rejoiced over this act" (36). Nearing the end of this section, however, the book offers a biblical yet shortsighted explanation of God's delight in the fullness of deity dwelling in the human body of Jesus: "He delighted in his Son's readiness to

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redeem the world" (36). Doubtless God rejoiced over becoming a man, for only this God-man could accomplish the redemption of God's fallen creatures—by virtue of His humanity, which could shed the blood of a genuine man, and by virtue of His divinity, which could ensure the eternal efficacy of that blood. Yet, more significantly, in view of God's eternal purpose—formed long before the fall of man—God delighted in becoming a man to establish a prototypical God-man—a man who lives God for the expression of God in humanity. From the manger to the cross, Christ, the first God-man, unceasingly manifested God in His human living as the prototype for His believers, the many God-men, His mass reproduction (John 5:19; 6:57; 14:10). This God-expressing human living that bore the image of God brought great delight to God's heart (Matt. 3:17), for it was a seminal fulfillment of His original purpose (as intimated in Genesis 1:26) to have His expanded expression in humanity. In this light, the greatness of the mystery of godliness that Paul speaks of lies not with God manifested in God but with God "manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). While Christ never shrank from declaring His eternal status as the Son of God, in His human living He repeatedly referred to Himself as the Son of Man, a term that bespeaks His intimate relationship and involvement with humankind. Christ's own emphasis on His humanity is in accord with the divine revelation that it is as the Son of Man that Christ carries out God's eternal economy. It is in His humanity that Christ was born as the seed of woman to bruise the serpent's head, manifested God in the flesh, died for our redemption, resurrected with a body, sits now at the right hand of God as the Lord of all, and will return

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to earth to reign in the millennium and in eternity (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:4; Luke 24:39; Acts 7:56; 2:36; Matt. 19:28; Rev. 22:1). Because *Pleasures* overstates God's pleasure in Christ as the Son of God at the expense of God's pleasure in Christ as the Son of Man, it misses out on the intrinsic significance of His humanity and human living in God's eternal purpose.

### *God's Pleasure in His Firstborn Son with His Many Sons*

This imbalance leads to the book's overemphasis on Christ as the only begotten Son to the neglect of Christ as the firstborn Son. The book portrays God's delight in His Son:

As long as God has been God (eternally) he has been conscious of himself; and the image that he has of himself is so perfect and so complete and so full as to be the living, personal reproduction (or begetting) of himself. And this living, personal image or radiance or form of God is *God*, namely God the Son....[T]herefore God's delight in the Son is delight in himself. The original, the primal, the deepest, the foundational joy of God is the joy he has in his own perfections as he sees them reflected in the glory of his Son. (42)

**H**ere *Pleasures* rightly touches on God's pleasure to beget Himself in His Son as His living reproduction and expression. It is true that in His eternal existence, God delights in His only begotten Son as His individual expression, for in the Godhead, the Son, possessing the same essence with and full attributes of the Father, alone expresses God as the image of the invisible God, the Word of God, the Witness of God, the mystery of God, the effulgence of God's glory, and the impress of God's substance (Phil. 2:6; John 1:1; Rev. 1:5; Col. 2:2; Heb. 1:3). It is equally true, however, that in His eternal economy to reproduce and manifest Himself in humanity, God delights in His firstborn Son with His brothers, the many sons of God, as His corporate expression, for they, possessing God's eternal life and divine nature, corporately express God in Christ as the Body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the branches of the vine, the fullness of God, the new man, and ultimately the New Jerusalem (2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Cor. 12:12; John 3:29-30; 15:1-8; Eph. 3:19; Col. 3:10-11; Rev. 21:2). *Pleasures* mentions the status of Christ as the only begotten Son, to the exclusion of the firstborn Son. In contrast, the New Testament reveals both statuses of Christ's sonship, referring to His divinity as the only Begotten five times (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) and to His divinity and humanity as the Firstborn five times (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15<sup>1</sup>, 18; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5). The Old Testament also records Jehovah's own prophecy that intimates the dual aspect of His Son: the children of Israel will look upon Christ in His second advent and "wail over Him with wailing as for an only son

and cry bitterly over Him with bitter crying as for a firstborn son" (Zech. 12:10).

**T**he book's omission of God's delight in His Firstborn with His many brothers is not insignificant, because the fulfillment of God's heart's desire is dependent upon Christ as the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father, becoming through His processes the firstborn Son among many brothers. Relative to His identity in the Godhead, Christ is eternally the only begotten Son of God and can never have brothers. Yet in incarnation the only begotten Son of God, who possessed in eternity only divinity without humanity, became the Son of Man in time, a God-man possessing both divinity and humanity. Although the incarnate Christ was the Son of God by virtue of His divinity (Matt. 16:16), His humanity, that is, His human flesh, was not the Son of God—for, though sinless, it did not have divinity. To bring Christ's human nature into the divine sonship, God begot Christ in His humanity by imparting the divine life into His humanity in His resurrection. In Acts 13:33 Paul thus declares, "God has fully fulfilled this promise to us their children in raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; this day have I begotten You.'" Christ in His divinity has always been the only begotten Son, but in His resurrection, His humanity was begotten to be the Son of God, thus pioneering the way for human beings to become the sons of God (Heb. 2:10-12). In Romans 1:3-4, Paul unveils that this birth of Christ in His humanity as the Son of God is tantamount to the human seed becoming the divine Son in resurrection: Christ in His humanity, the seed of David according to the flesh, "was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Since it was in resurrection that His humanity was begotten by God and thus designated the Son of God, Paul calls Him "the Firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18). The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten Christ in His humanity in His resurrection, has also "regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). On the day of His resurrection, Christ thus called His disciples His brothers, and His Father their Father (Matt. 28:10; John 20:17). In resurrection Christ thus became "the Firstborn among many brothers," and His many brothers, His reproduction, will be progressively conformed to His image to be designated sons of God (Rom. 8:19, 29). While the firstborn Son will be forever preeminent among and never share His deity with His many brothers, through conformation the many sons of God will become the same as their elder Brother, the firstborn Son—in life, nature, and expression, but not in the Godhead. This will satisfy God's heart's desire to have a corporate reproduction of His beloved Son in humanity (Col. 1:18; 3:4; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 3:2). Admittedly, *Pleasures* refers to Romans 8:29 ten times and speaks of our being conformed to the

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image of Christ. Unfortunately, however, the book treats our conformity to the image of Christ mainly as our destiny as fixed by the love of God. It thus falls short of unveiling our conformation to the image of Christ as the fulfillment of God's great delight in His Firstborn and His many brothers as the corporate enlargement of His Son.

Perhaps the root cause of the book's omission of God's delight in His many sons is its premise. It is a premise that, ironically, ignores the central pleasure of God:

We need to see first and foremost that God is God—that he is perfect and complete in himself, that he is overflowing with happiness in the eternal fellowship of the Trinity, and that he does not need us to complete his fullness and is not deficient without us. (22)

This assumption leads the book to contend that “God has no needs that I could ever be required to satisfy. God has no deficiencies that I might be required to supply” (208). There is no denying that in the Godhead, the Triune God is self-existing and self-sufficient, as implied by His own title: “I Am Who I Am” (Exo. 3:14); from eternity to eternity there is no lack, deficiency, or defect within Himself. Yet the Bible—in particular Ephesians 1—also reveals that God has a desire, the good pleasure of His will—“His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, unto the economy of the fullness of the times” (vv. 5, 9-10). According to His good pleasure, and under no external coercion, God formulated His eternal economy derived from His eternal desire to have an enlarged expression of Himself. This expression involves humanity. The execution of His purpose is central to His satisfaction and ultimately requires human cooperation; in this sense, God needs man for the satisfaction of His good pleasure. A desire for expression in and through humanity does not imply any ontological deficiency in God. This desire does not spring from a lack or imperfection in God Himself that jeopardizes His self-existence or diminishes the delight within the fellowship of the Divine Trinity; rather, it is a reflection of His magnanimity that He would willingly enlarge the fellowship that He enjoys within the Trinity to human vessels with the capacity to receive, enjoy, and participate in this fellowship (1 John 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:9; John 14:20; 17:21).

In John 12:24 the incarnate Christ, the unique God-man, unveils God's desire to reproduce, and even multiply, His Son in humanity: “Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides *alone*; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (emphasis added). Just as a single grain of wheat falls into the ground, dies, and grows up to be reproduced as many grains of wheat, Christ as the only begotten Son of God in the flesh passed through death and resurrected to become the firstborn Son of God with the many sons of God as His reproduction for

the fulfillment of God's desire for the multiplication of His Son in life. God's desire and need for His many sons does not arise from any lack of His joy in His only begotten Son but from His profound delight in His eternal Son, the Beloved. God so loved the Son that He desired and purposed to reproduce His Son in a great many human beings, making Him the firstborn Son and them His many sons for an enlarged expression of Himself in the Son (17:24). Had *Pleasures* touched this desire in God's heart, it would have declared that God does have a need which we should satisfy, for we exist for the sole purpose of satisfying God's longing for His many sons as the corporate reproduction of His beloved Son.

### *God's Pleasure in Dispensing Himself into the Tripartite Man*

Perhaps the lack of emphasis on God's desire for many sons lies in the book's failure to grasp the kernel of how God accomplishes His good pleasure. God intends to reproduce His Son in humanity by dispensing Himself as life into His chosen and redeemed tripartite elect for their enjoyment and His expression. He desires to work *Himself* in the Son as the Spirit *into* our tripartite being. Paul thus testifies of “God who operates *in* you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure,” namely, to have many sons conformed to the image of His Son (Phil. 2:13, emphasis added). Recognizing God's desire to work in us, *Pleasures* attempts to describe a broad span of God's salvation of man:

Salvation is the big biblical term that describes all God's saving work for us and in us, past, present, and future. We “have been saved” (Ephesians 2:8), “are being saved” (1 Corinthians 1:18) and “will be saved” (Romans 13:11; 1 Peter 1:5). (245)

Yet the book comes short of revealing that God's salvific work occurs through the dispensing of Himself into our tripartite vessel. This process began with the regeneration of our spirit in the past, progresses with the transformation of our soul in the present, and will consummate with the redemption of our body in the future (John 3:6; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Pet. 1:22-23; Rom. 8:23). In Romans 8, Paul reveals God's desire to dispense Himself as life into our tripartite being, first making our spirit life, then making our soul (represented by our mind) life, and eventually giving life to our mortal bodies (vv. 10, 6, 11). Only by enjoying this divine dispensing of the Triune God into our being can we be matured in the divine life and thus conformed to the image of the firstborn Son as His corporate duplication; apart from the divine dispensing, we can only resort to our human endeavors to adopt a godly posture and cultivate moral behavior.

*Pleasures* seems to stress these human endeavors in the

last three chapters, which purport to address “the practical matter of how *we* can delight the heart of God” (208). In the main, *Pleasures* suggests that we can please God by fearing Him, hoping in Him, praying to Him with an upright heart, obeying His commandments, and depending on Him. Yet what pleases God is not primarily our humble disposition or our obedient actions but the constitution of our tripartite being with God Himself. Since God delights only in His Son, what delights the indwelling God within us is nothing other than His Son being wrought into us and reproduced in us. Paul tells the Galatian believers the goal of his apostolic ministry: “My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you” (4:19). Paul prays on behalf of the Ephesian believers that the indwelling Christ may make His home in their hearts (3:17). What delights God is not merely the upright heart that trembles at His Word and trusts in His mercy, as the book suggests, but the Christ-saturated heart—where Christ has possessed, occupied, and permeated every part of our inner being with Himself. What delights God is not our cultivation of humility, piety, and integrity, as *Pleasures* indicates, but Christ revealed in us, Christ living in us, Christ magnified in us, and Christ becoming all of our human virtues until each of us can unashamedly declare with Paul, “For to me, to live is Christ” (Gal. 1:15-16; 2:20; Phil. 1:20-21). *Pleasures* is right in positing that “how we view God will determine our idea of how we can please God” (208). If *Pleasures* had presented God as the dispensing Triune God who delights only in His Son, it would have revealed His good pleasure in seeing His beloved Son, Christ, wrought into His many sons and repeating His God-manifesting human living in their living for the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16).

This oversight is related to the book’s neglect of God’s subjective interaction with His believers in their human spirit. To its credit, the book twice speaks of our need to become “‘spiritual’ ones” who can receive the revelation of God according to 1 Corinthians 2:15 (279, 283). Yet overall, *Pleasures* falls short of underscoring the pivotal role of the human spirit in the divine economy. In unveiling His heart’s yearning for a dwelling place in man, Jehovah proclaims that He looks to the human spirit for “the place of My rest” (Isa. 66:1-2; Eph. 2:22). Consonant with John 4:7, which speaks of Christ’s longing for a drink, verses 23-24 state that the Father “seeks” the true worshippers who will “worship the Father in spirit and truthfulness.” Since God is Spirit, God can fellowship and interact with man only on the level of his human spirit. In creation the Triune God formed the human spirit as an organ to contact and receive Him, and in regeneration He joined the believers’ human spirit with the Divine Spirit to dwell in their regenerated spirit (Zech. 12:1; John 3:5-6; 1 Cor. 6:17). Thus, for His rest and satisfaction, God seeks, and needs, true worshippers—

believers who exercise their regenerated human spirit to experience Him, fellowship with Him, and be filled with Him. Apart from the union of the human spirit and the Divine Spirit, no amount of so-called Christian endeavors, however sincere or zealous, can contribute to the fulfillment of God’s longing for His expression through humanity.

Although *Pleasures* rightly underlines the importance of prayer as “the power that wields the weapon of the Word” (221), which is based on Ephesians 6:17-18, it neglects Paul’s charge in the same verses to pray “at every time in spirit.” The book encourages the believers to obey God’s commandments by faith. Yet it fails to point out that faith is in our regenerated spirit, the “spirit of faith,” wherein dwells Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (2 Cor. 4:13; Heb. 12:2). Realizing that we can obey God’s commandments only in our spirit, Paul repeatedly commands the believers to live and walk by the spirit, because when we walk according to the spirit, the righteous requirement of God’s law is spontaneously fulfilled in us by the inward working of the Spirit of life (Gal. 5:16, 18, 25; Rom. 8:4). Although *Pleasures* admirably claims that a “spiritual sense or taste for God” is a prerequisite for Christian scholarship, its inability to distinguish the human spirit from the human soul undercuts the force of its claim (298). The book contends that “knowing God as fully as possible demands immediate supernatural revelation to the soul” (288). In contrast, Paul prays on behalf of the Ephesian believers for “a *spirit* of wisdom and revelation” in the full knowledge of God and tells them that the mystery of Christ has been “revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in *spirit*” (Eph. 1:17; 3:5, emphasis added).

### *God’s Pleasure in Manifesting Himself as an Organic Being and an Eternal Dispensing*

*Pleasures’* omission of the Triune God’s central desire to dispense Himself as life into tripartite men stems from its conception of the Triune God in His eternal Being. In the introduction the book posits that “the most fundamental truth” with which we must begin is that “from all eternity God has been supremely happy in the fellowship of the Trinity” (21). In the context of *Pleasures*, “Everything hangs on the unbounded joy in the triune God from all eternity” (39). The book’s primary characterization of God’s eternal Being—His overflowing happiness in the fellowship of the Trinity—accords with its description of His people’s eternal destiny—enjoying in heaven God’s pleasure in the Son and the Son’s infinite delight in the Father. The final chapter of the book depicts the soul’s end: “an infinite, eternal, mutual, holy energy of love and pleasure between God the Father and God the Son flowing out in the Person of God the Spirit, and filling the souls of the redeemed with immeasurable and everlasting joy” (311-312).

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The book's notion of the eternal Being of the Triune God in terms of the mutual delight within the Trinity does have a biblical basis. Yet it comes short of penetrating to the heart of the biblical revelation of who the Triune God is in His eternal existence. In the inaugural issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, Kerry S. Robichaux in "Axioms of the Trinity" contends that the terms *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit* show that the Triune God is an organic Being, and that as an organic Being He is in Himself an eternal dispensing. The former means that the Triune God is a Being of life: "As Father He is the source of divine life, as Son He is the expression of divine life, and as the Spirit He is the essence of divine life" (8). The latter means that the Triune God is a dynamic Being: "The Father is ever dispensing the divine essence into the Son and thereby begetting Him eternally; the Son is ever receiving and expressing that dispensing and is thus eternally begotten of the Father; the Spirit is ever dispensed as the divine essence by the Father and eternally proceeds from Him" (11). As *Pleasures* rightly points out, God "delights in being known for who he really is" (98). The Triune God, who is an organic Being and an eternal dispensing in His eternal existence, desires in His economy to make manifest who He is in His eternal Being—through humanity. Fulfilling both this desire in God's heart and the purpose of our existence, we believers manifest that the Triune God is eternally an organic Being because in regeneration we have been begotten of God the Father with His divine life through the Spirit of life and are thus His many sons, the many brothers of the firstborn Son (John 1:12-13; Heb. 2:10-12). To satisfy the desire of His heart, we believers can express that the Triune God is an eternal dispensing because we, the tripartite vessel, can receive the divine dispensing of the Triune God Himself by partaking of the divine nature of the Father, eating Christ the Son as the bread of life, and drinking the life-giving Spirit (2 Pet. 1:4; John 6:33, 48, 57; 1 Cor. 12:13; 15:45). Ultimately, God will find His eternal delight in the New Jerusalem—His firstborn Son united with His many sons completely conformed to His image—for the New Jerusalem will forever validate that the Triune God is an organic Being and an eternal dispensing (Rev. 21:2, 7, 11). For eternity the many sons of God, the constituents of the New Jerusalem, will enjoy the divine dispensing of the Triune God who will feed them with Himself in the Son as the tree of life and will flow Himself out as the Spirit, the river of water of life, for our supreme delight and His organic, corporate, and consummate expression (22:1-2). In this light, the book's portrayal of the believers' eternal destiny—delighting in the pleasures of God in heaven—comes short of the biblical revelation of the believers' eternal destiny, which coincides with His eternal satisfaction in the New Jerusalem (21:2; 22:14, 17). This shortcoming issues from the failure to realize that the Triune God in His eternal existence reflected in the economy of His salvation is not merely a joyful Being—"this inexhaustible fountain of

self-replenishing joy," as the book suggests (21-22)—but more intrinsically, an organic Being and an eternal dispensing—the Father as the fountain of life who takes pleasure in manifesting Himself in the Son as the spring of life and in flowing Himself into His many sons as the Spirit, the river of life, to satisfy and saturate them with Himself (Psa. 36:8-9; Jer. 2:13; John 4:14; 7:38-39).

Authored by a lover of God, *Pleasures* admirably affirms the believers' right to enjoy God and their need to study the Bible with prayer in order to know God and His pleasures. Focusing on the pleasures of God rather than the needs of man, the book clearly reveals God's delight in Himself reflected perfectly in His only begotten Son. Yet it falls short of unveiling the center of God's good pleasure to reproduce His beloved Son in many sons by dispensing Himself as life into redeemed tripartite humanity. Had *Pleasures* probed more deeply the biblical passages that disclose God's desire to duplicate His Son in humanity for His enlarged expression, it would have revealed that God's pleasure is not only in God Himself alone but also in Himself wrought into and expressed through redeemed humanity.

by David Yoon

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Detailed discussion of the implications of "the Firstborn of all creation" in Colossians 1:15 is contained in Kerry S. Robichaux's article, "Christ the Firstborn," in the April 1997 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*.

#### Works Cited

- Robichaux, Kerry S. "Axioms of the Trinity." *Affirmation & Critique* I.1 (January 1996): 6-11.
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### An Incomplete Understanding of God's Full Salvation

*Saved from What?* by R. C. Sproul. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002.

In 1969, at the Conwell School of Theology on the campus of Temple University, a young man accosted R. C. Sproul with a question: "Are you saved?" Unsure of exactly how to answer, Sproul responded with the first words that came to his mind: "Saved from what?"

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Sproul's rejoinder, the young man's faltering answer to it, and a number of similar incidents throughout the ensuing years made a deep impression on Sproul. Although many evangelical Christians are full of zeal for the message of the gospel, most of them possess little understanding of the gospel they so zealously preach. Distressed by this "apparent ignorance of the most elementary article of Christianity," salvation, Sproul in *Saved from What?* (hereafter *Saved*), answers not only the title question but also the questions "saved by what?" and "saved for what?" (15, 18). Around these three central questions Sproul organizes his book and through the progression of eight chapters seeks to present a panorama of God's salvation. The central thrust of the book is that, having fallen in sin, we are in desperate need of salvation from God's wrath, and through Christ's redemptive work and our subjective appropriation of it, we can be adopted to be God's sons and go to heaven, where we will see God in His glory. In so great a salvation, we are saved "by God, from God, and for God" (123). While there is certainly much to affirm from the pages of this book, there are matters that stand in need of careful critique.

### Summary

In Part I, entitled "Saved from What?", *Saved* introduces the central concept of salvation as being salvation from the wrath that is to come—the unique calamity from which every sinful human being must be saved (22). In this section, *Saved* accomplishes the twofold task of proving that we not only need salvation but that we are unable to save ourselves and thus are in need of a Savior. In Part II, "Saved by What?" the sinner's need in relation to a holy God is atonement in general and the cross specifically, the cross being the unique atoning act in the New Testament (37). In this section, *Saved* introduces to us the three "actors" in the drama of redemption—"man, God the Father, and God the Son in His incarnate work as Messiah and Redeemer" (51)—as well as the immense, threefold problem of sin that is solved by Christ's substitutionary death on the cross. After orienting the reader to the governing principles of covenants in the Old Testament, *Saved* describes how Christ on the cross took upon Himself the curse that was upon us, became the curse, and suffered the penalty of the law (83, 81). In this way redemption was brought to us (85). In the final chapter of this section, *Saved* presents the way that the sinner may subjectively appropriate the benefits of Christ's work. In "Saved for What?" the third and briefest section of the book, *Saved* identifies and enlarges upon the twofold purpose for which God has accomplished so great a salvation for us: our adoption as the sons of God and the beatific vision.

### The Measure for Success

*Saved* implies that its mission is to educate an evangelical

Christian public that knows alarmingly little about the salvation it seems to care so much about. "Do evangelical Christians today have any clearer understanding of the gospel, of what it means to be saved?" writes Sproul. "Sadly...there often seems to be little understanding even among those who are most active in evangelical circles" (14-15). "And when we're talking about salvation," Sproul continues several pages later, "we are talking about the concept that is *the central theme of all sacred Scripture*—a concept that it is imperative to understand" (18). Given the unique importance of salvation in the Bible and given the purpose of this volume to elucidate the subject to the broader Christian public, Sproul, whether explicitly or not, sets a high standard by which to measure this book's success.

### An Accurate View of Redemption

As its title would indicate, *Saved* expends considerable energies emphasizing the grave situation of the unsaved and their desperate need for salvation. Given the decline of the notion of original sin and total depravity among increasing numbers of Christian circles and the ascent of more palatable ideas that emphasize God's love to the detriment of God's righteousness, most believers today are largely comfortable and self-satisfied, possessing but the slightest inkling of the truly frightful situation related to their sinful situation. Concerned by such nonchalance, Sproul gently yet repeatedly directs the reader to the severity of sin on one hand, the righteousness and holiness of God on the other, and the irreconcilability of God and man unless the problem of sin is resolved. *Saved* warns the reader: "We have discounted the severity of our sin" while simultaneously forgetting that God is a "God of perfect holiness, who demands satisfaction for His justice and who will not wink at sin" (28, 41). Thus, the book warns against the passivity, even callousness, to our real situation (34). "The last thing in the world the impenitent sinner ever wants to meet on the other side of the grave," *Saved* notes, is a holy and just God (25). The reader is then helped to realize that there is nothing that he can do of himself to solve his problem with God (45-46). *Saved* deals blow after blow to illusions that one may have of after a Pelagian fashion somehow surviving judgment by himself and being justified by the works of the flesh (31-32). In other words, not only can sinners not live without salvation; they also require a Savior. *Saved* does an admirable job of exposing the sinner's fundamental problem of sin, awakens in him the realization that he desperately needs to be saved from the wrath of a holy and righteous God, and lays bare his false hope of his being able to solve the problem by himself.

Although it gives an able portrayal of man's need for salvation and a Savior, *Saved*'s most notable strength lies in

its concise and clear presentation of the means of God's salvation—the atoning work of Christ. In these chapters, *Saved* gives an excellent thumbnail sketch of the central factors of Christ's redemption. In "The Drama of Redemption" *Saved* discusses the three dimensions of sin—sin as a debt, an act of enmity, and a crime—and how each of these aspects of sin is solved by Christ with respect to both God and man. In the case of sin as a debt, God is a creditor, we are the debtors who cannot pay our debts (51-52), and Christ is our "surety," "the One who cosigns our note...back[ing] up our indebtedness by taking upon Himself the obligation to pay what must be paid" (55). As regards sin as an act of enmity, we are the enemies of God, God is the injured or offended party, and Christ is the Mediator who reconciles God and us through His death (55-59). Concerning sin as a crime, God functions as the Governor and the Judge, we are the criminals, and Christ is our Substitute who suffers the penalty of our crime in our place (59-62). This clear and concise presentation of sin and how the problem of sin is solved by Christ with regard to God and us is exemplary and will no doubt be of considerable help to those who lack clarity concerning these matters.

Continuing his exposition of Christ's redemption Sproul elucidates the role of blessing and curse in the death of Christ. After orienting the reader to the governing principles of covenants in the Old Testament—namely that keeping the stipulations of a covenant results in blessing (a condition of being in God's presence) and breaching the stipulations results in curse (a condition of being cut off from God's presence)—*Saved* seeks to help the reader understand the atonement of Christ in the broader scope of the covenant.

In the final chapter of Part II (ch. 7), *Saved* makes known to us how we can appropriate the benefits of Christ's work. Through the imputation of our unrighteousness to Christ and the imputation of His righteousness to us, we are justified and declared righteous by God. At the very moment we receive Jesus Christ, all that He has accomplished in His redemption is applied to us and we are justified. "Justification is by Christ alone. It is by His merit, His righteousness, His life, His death that we can stand in the presence of a holy God. Without Christ we are without hope because all we can ever offer to God is our 'unjustness'" (99). Once again, Sproul clearly affirms the truth by making known clearly the practical means by which we as sinners condemned by God can be saved from the coming wrath.

## An Inadequate Understanding of God's Complete Salvation

While *Saved* is solid concerning many of the fundamentals of the salvation that God has afforded us, it is by no means complete. A vital element of God's salvation—indeed, an entire aspect of it—is neglected altogether. So glaring is this omission that the positive impact that portions of this book might have on a reader is greatly compromised. Anyone who reads this book, even if he is helped regarding some aspects of salvation, will be hindered from viewing entire vistas of the biblical revelation.

**God created man in a particular way in order to fulfill His heart's desire. God created him in His own image and according to His own likeness as a vessel to contain Him and express Him.**

*Saved's* goal is to educate the Christian public concerning the salvation that God has prepared for us. Its success, therefore, must rise or fall based upon whether it accurately and thoroughly presents this crucial item of the Christian faith. In this regard, the matters that *Saved* omits are so fundamental to the

means and goal of God's complete salvation that full attention must be called to their absence.

## A Synopsis of God's Complete Salvation

In eternity past, God had a good pleasure, a heart's desire: to be expressed through man (Eph. 1:9, 4-6). God created man in a particular way in order to fulfill His heart's desire. God created him in His own image and according to His own likeness as a vessel to contain Him and express Him (Gen. 1:26). In order for this to be realized, man needs to be filled with God as life so that he might be exactly like Him in life, nature, and expression. Despite God's high intention, made possible by the placement of man in front of the tree of life, man succumbed to the temptation of Satan and violated God's loving command by eating of the fruit of the wrong tree. This violated God's righteousness. As a result, man was prohibited by God's righteousness from receiving God's life and thus from fulfilling God's purpose. In order to restore man to a condition in which His purpose could be fulfilled, God's righteousness, which cannot be compromised (cf. Psa. 89:14), had to be satisfied—the fallen sinners had to be redeemed in a way that satisfied God's righteousness. The Lord Jesus Christ accomplished such a redemption and fulfilled the requirements of God's righteousness by living a perfect life and dying on the cross for us. This redemption, consisting of the sinner's forgiveness (Luke 24:47), cleansing (Heb. 1:3), justification (Rom. 3:24-25), reconciliation (5:10), and positional sanctification (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 13:12), solved sinful man's profound dilemma with respect to God's righteousness and brought him back to a

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position in which God could once again accomplish what had been in His heart from eternity past. Because Christ's redemption restores us to a right relationship with God, we can describe it as *judicial* (Lee 8). By its very nature, judicial redemption is a strictly restorative procedure—it reclaims man from a destiny of suffering God's judgment and brings him back to where he was before the fall with respect to God's righteousness and God's purpose.

**H**owever, judicial redemption in itself does not bring God and man any closer to achieving God's good pleasure than they were prior to the entrance of sin any more than repairing a punctured tire en route will in itself bring a driver to his destination. Judicial redemption alone can never fulfill God's purpose; at most, it qualifies the sinner to participate in God's purpose. It is only at the point that the sinner appropriates Christ's judicial redemption by believing into Him that the purpose of God's salvation begins to unfold, for there yet remains an entire aspect of salvation for the forgiven, cleansed, justified, reconciled, and positionally sanctified sinner to experience. This second aspect of salvation is *organic* (8), for it is the side of salvation that God accomplishes in His redeemed elect by His divine life (Rom. 5:10). If judicial redemption is the procedure of God's salvation, organic salvation is the purpose, for it directly fulfills and accomplishes the good pleasure which God purposed in Himself. From the beginning, God's good pleasure has been that He would fill man with His life so that through man God might be expressed. Our experience of organic salvation consummates in such an expression. Organic salvation is a process that consists of regeneration, by which we receive the eternal life of God, sanctification in our disposition (6:19), renewing in our mind (12:2), transformation in our soul (2 Cor. 3:18), conformation to the image of God's firstborn Son (maturity in the divine life) (Rom. 8:29), and glorification (Heb. 2:10) (Lee 14). The organic aspect of God's complete salvation issues in the built up Body of Christ (Eph. 4:15-16). As we experience God's salvation in life, we are built up as the living Body of Christ, which becomes and is consummated in the city of life, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). When God's organic salvation has been carried out in full, the "Triune God and His regenerated, sanctified, transformed, and glorified elect will be joined and mingled as one to constitute an organism as the enlargement and expression of God in eternity" (14). Both—judicial redemption and organic salvation—are necessary for God's complete salvation. *Saved* lacks this comprehensive view of salvation.

### Saved from What?

The first part of *Saved* addresses the question "saved from what?" *Saved* basically answers, "The ultimate salvation that any human being can ever experience is rescue from the wrath that is to come," and "When we

talk about salvation biblically, we have to remember from what ultimately we are saved. We are saved from the wrath that is to come, the wrath of God" (22, 69). And again, "When we consider that we deserve to be consumed by His fury and realize that His fury has instead consumed Jesus in our place, when we recognize the greatness of the peril, we then are able to see the greatness of the salvation that He has bestowed upon us" (26). With such statements before us, it is easy to understand the thrust of statements such as, "The supreme achievement of the cross is that Christ has placated the wrath of God, which would burn against me were I not covered by His sacrifice," and "The work of Christ was done to placate the wrath of God" (70, 69).

**W**hile it is indisputable that "Jesus is the Savior who saves us from the wrath that is to come" (24), salvation entails a rescue from more than just the fury of a righteous God. Through our experience of God's organic salvation, we are saved from a host of things that hinder our receiving God's life to express Him, including our natural life, our unholy nature, our unrenewed mind, self-likeness, immaturity as sons of God, and everything that falls short of the glory of God. First, through regeneration, which is our being born of the Spirit and our receiving the impartation of the divine life into our spirit, we are saved from our old manner of living, namely a living which is by the natural—and fallen—human life. By receiving the divine life through regeneration and by partaking daily of Christ, who is our life (Col. 3:4), in the Word and in prayer, we no longer live by our natural life but by Christ's life within us as the basis and the means (John 6:57; Gal. 2:20; Matt. 16:24). Second, when we experience the sanctification of our disposition, we enjoy the addition of the holy nature of God into our being. By being sanctified in our disposition by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16) with the resurrection life of Christ, our natural, unholy disposition is sanctified with the divine, holy nature of God (2 Pet. 1:4) so that we may be holy unto God (Eph. 1:4). Dispositional sanctification is thus a marvelous salvation from our unholy nature. Third, when we allow the renewing Spirit to mingle with our human spirit and spread into our mind (1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 4:23) by the teaching of the holy Scriptures and the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, we experience a great deliverance from the influence of the old creation in our mind and subjectively enter into God's new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), thus to participate in God's mind (Phil. 2:5). Fourth, our experience of transformation fills us with God Himself so that we may express the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18) and be saved from the shame of expressing ourselves (Phil. 1:19-20). Fifth, in conformation, we participate in God's divinity in full and are matured to be the full-grown sons of God (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5). Conformation therefore saves us from immaturity as the sons of God. Finally, our experience of being glorified, which is the consummation

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of our experience of God's complete salvation, sets us wholly free from everything that is not God or that is contrary to His life, nature, mind, being, image, and glory (Heb. 2:10; Phil. 3:21). Christ's judicial redemption saves us from the condemnation of the holy and righteous God, and for that we are eternally grateful. But how much more excelling, knowledge-surpassing, and unsearchably rich is the organic salvation God has prepared for those who love Him and who are called according to His eternal good pleasure! Would that *Saved* had presented the truth and experience of God's organic salvation and the power it has to save us from all things that stand against the fulfillment of God's heart's desire instead of focusing solely on the judicial side of salvation.

### Saved by What?

Part II's central thesis is that due to the fall, man needs atonement—the “*sine qua non* of the Christian faith” (47)—and the cross—the unique atoning act in the New Testament (37, 47). These two matters form the core message of this part of the book and answer the question, “Saved by what?” “The means *by* which God accomplishes this great salvation may be described as the most crucial aspect of the work of Christ. Indeed, His work goes to the crux of the matter” (41), taking care of our problem of sin (51), our need for a ransom (64), our being cursed (81), and our want of justification (98-99). On the cross Christ accomplished the reconciling action that satisfied God's justice and restored our relationship with God on this cross (47). Hence, Christ's cross is absolutely indispensable to our salvation (48) and is, in fact, the very means that God uses to save us. This fact *Saved* presents very ably. Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the two aspects of God's complete salvation (judicial and organic), and *Saved* falls short of offering a complete treatment of this salvation that God has prepared for us.

**I**n Romans 5:10 the apostle Paul writes, “For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled.” Two phrases figure prominently in this verse, both related to the means of salvation. The first phrase, *through the death of His Son* is in conjunction with *reconciled* (implying salvation), and the second phrase, *in His life*, modifies the word *saved*. This verse thus displays the means of God's full salvation in both its judicial and organic aspects. Through the death of God's Son, God has forgiven, cleansed, justified, and reconciled us to Himself. This aspect of salvation Christ accomplishes outside of us for our objective salvation—a positional salvation from condemnation and eternal punishment (v. 9). However, our salvation should not be limited to what Christ accomplished outside of us some two thousand years ago; we need to

experience throughout our lifetime the subjective salvation that Christ accomplishes within us by the working of His divine life—the salvation that commenced with our regeneration and continues through our dispositional sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and eventually consummates with glorification. Therefore, contrary to the view that *Saved* presents, the means of God's salvation is not merely outward and judicial in nature; that is, God's salvation is not merely through Christ's dying a redemptive death on the cross in order to save us from the execution of His righteous judgment and eventual punishment upon us. The means of God's salvation is also inward and organic—as the life-giving Spirit, He regenerates us with Himself as life and then spreads as life within us until our entire being—spirit, soul, and body—is fully saturated with Himself as life. *Saved* never so much as mentions this aspect of God's full salvation in its discussion of what it is that we are saved by.

### Saved for What?

In Part III, “Saved for What,” *Saved* identifies adoption as part of the twofold purpose for which God has accomplished so great a salvation on our behalf. *Saved* marvels at God's immeasurable filial love toward us, a love which causes sinners to be saved from wrath and adopted to be God's sons. This is the “end or purpose for which we are made,” “our highest point of glory,” and “the very acme of our salvation” (108). *Saved* then links our adoption to “heaven, our destination” (107), which in turn is identified as the New Jerusalem, and by inference, the Father's house. “We are promised rooms in our Father's house,” *Saved* avers, pointing to John 14:1-4, 25-28, and 1 John 3:1-3, “because we have been adopted into our Father's family” (107).

*Saved's* errors and shortcomings here are several. The first is the matter of adoption, the notion that we become the children of God and brothers of Christ not through a divine birth but merely through God's legal acceptance of us. *Saved* writes that “Jesus is God's only natural Son. All others enter His family through adoption in Christ” (110). Such a statement directly contradicts the revelation of the holy Scriptures, which tell us in unmistakable terms that we as believers have actually been *born* of God and are consequently His actual progeny. In John 1:13, the apostle John uses the word *begotten* to describe the process by which we have become God's children. The apostle Paul also makes this clear when he identifies Christ as the “Firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29). Christ was surely born to be God's firstborn Son (Acts 13:33; Rom. 8:29)—this is different from His being the only begotten Son from eternity (John 1:18). In the same way that God begot Christ in resurrection, God has regenerated us to be His many sons (1 Pet. 1:3; Heb. 2:10). We are God's sons

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and Christ's brothers not by adoption; we are God's kin because He is our Father. *Saved's* inaccurate view of sonship betrays a deep flaw in its understanding of God's salvation. So much has *Saved* limited itself to an outward and judicial notion of salvation that it simply cannot grasp the revelation of the Scriptures concerning our organic relationship with our Father God. Since it understands salvation in legal terms only, the only kind of sonship it can fathom is one of legal adoption; the thought that we are actual, bonafide sons of God seems not to be within *Saved's* universe of thought.

The second error, which again exposes *Saved's* deficient view of God's salvation, is the identification (or rather, the misidentification) of heaven as the New Jerusalem. *Saved* designates the believer's destiny as both "heaven" and "the New Jerusalem," implying that they are one and the same (31, 121). The New Jerusalem is not heaven, nor is it any physical entity. Rather, it is the ultimate issue of God's saving of the redeemed in His divine life so that they might express Him corporately for eternity (for a detailed exposition of this matter, please refer to Ed Marks's "The New Jerusalem—A Corporate Person" in *A&C* V:2).

The third error, which in fact underlies the two above errors, also relates to *Saved's* insufficient apprehension of salvation—this time its failure to recognize the link between the means and the goal of salvation. According to *Saved*, Christ's atoning death and our appropriation of it make us the adopted sons of God today and the inhabitants of heaven tomorrow; any meaningful cause-and-effect relationship between the two is scant to none (except in the sense that redemption *qualifies* us to enjoy the goal of salvation). Indeed, *Saved* apparently does not recognize the existence of anything that meaningfully joins one to the other except perhaps, in the case of heaven, the passage of time. The apostles, however, holding to the truth of both judicial redemption and organic salvation, realized that there is an aspect that plays a vital role in actually maturing the believers as the sons of God. In this sense, the organic salvation consummates the goal. We as the sons of God are not born as adults, nor does the New Jerusalem, with us as its constituents, suddenly materialize out of nowhere; we grow and mature through our experience of God's organic salvation in day-to-day situations throughout our lifetime.

### Broadening Our View of God's Salvation

*Saved's* basic shortcoming is its total neglect of the organic aspect of God's complete salvation. As a result, it has an inadequate view of what we are saved *from*, overlooks the very means *by* which we are saved throughout the Christian life, and misinterprets the ultimate purpose for which we are saved. *Saved's* failure is not rare. So consistently have Christian teachers overlooked the organic side

of God's salvation and so unanimously have they adopted and propounded a "redemption only" view of salvation that this deficient view is considered normative by most Christians. Consequently, *Saved's* deficiencies will likely raise few eyebrows in the church. Instead, it will merely reinforce ingrained ways of thinking and bury already forgotten truths under more and thicker veils. God's complete salvation has both a judicial and an organic side; both are of vital importance to God, and both must be central to the teaching and experience of every Christian. The readers of *Saved*, and those who espouse its deficient view of salvation, would do well to consider Witness Lee's insight concerning God's complete salvation in his landmark book *The Organic Aspect of God's Salvation*:

God's judicial redemption as the procedure is purposeless without God's organic salvation. It would be merely for sinners to be redeemed, have their sins forgiven, and become righteous people justified by God, but the purpose is unclear to the majority of believers who mistakenly consider their going to heaven as the purpose of their being redeemed and are unaware that, according to the revelation of the holy Scriptures, God's judicial redemption as the procedure is with God's organic salvation as the purpose, which is to regenerate us, shepherd us, sanctify us dispositionally, renew us, transform us, and build us up into the Body of Christ, which ultimately consummates the New Jerusalem as the ultimate purpose of God's organic salvation to be God's enlargement and expression in eternity. (75-76)

This being the case, a thorough re-alignment of thought must take place in the Christian community concerning the definition and thus the experience of the salvation that God has prepared for us. While maintaining the highest regard for and emphasis on God's judicial redemption, we as the regenerated sons of God must seek to enter into the day-by-day experience of God's salvation in life. God's judicial redemption, which *Saved* presents by and large with insight and accuracy, is the procedure by which God reaches the purpose of saving us in His life. However, after our appropriation of Christ's judicial redemption, our need for the experience of the divine life remains. This complete salvation consummates in God's ultimate intention, the fulfillment of His eternal good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself—the New Jerusalem, in which God is glorified in and through humanity. May God have mercy upon us all, that we may enter into so great a salvation.

by Nathan Betz

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