

The Three Stages of God's Full Salvation and the Constant Salvation in Our Practical Life

by Witness Lee

First Peter 1:5 says, "Who are being guarded by the power of God through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time." Many years ago I was bothered whenever I read this verse. I was troubled by the phrase *unto a salvation*. According to this phrase, it would seem that we do not yet have salvation, for we are being guarded by the power of God unto a salvation. I could not understand why we are being guarded unto a salvation if we have already received salvation. I was certain that I had received God's salvation and had been saved. Regarding this matter, I was very strong. Whenever someone asked me if I had been saved, I replied, "Yes, I have been saved." Furthermore, I visited many places preaching the assurance of salvation. I pointed out the verses in the New Testament that indicate that, when we believed in the Lord Jesus, we were saved and that we may have the assurance of this salvation. But here is a verse in 1 Peter 1:5 with the phrase *unto a salvation*. I wondered if Peter was correct in his knowledge regarding salvation. I thought that he might have said something wrong according to doctrine. I had such a consideration because I was puzzled, bothered, by this verse.

In 1:5 Peter says that this salvation is "ready to be revealed." This means that salvation is not yet here. Therefore, I said to myself, "What does it mean that salvation is ready to be revealed? I have already received God's salvation. How, then, can salvation be ready to be revealed? Peter says that salvation is ready to be revealed at the last time. What is this last time?" I was bothered not only by the phrase *unto a salvation*, but also by the words *ready to be revealed at the last time*. I did not know why salvation had yet to be revealed, and I did not understand when the last time would be.

Now I realize that salvation is not a simple matter. Salvation covers a long span and cannot be enjoyed or

experienced all at once. God's full salvation is of three stages: the initial stage, the progressing stage, and the completing stage. I would encourage all the saints, especially the young people, to gain a thorough knowledge of these three stages of God's full salvation. In particular, we need to understand what God's salvation does for us in each stage. We need to know from what we are delivered in each stage of God's full salvation. We also need to know the items or aspects of this salvation and its results. In each of the three stages of God's full salvation we are delivered from particular things, we experience certain matters, and we have definite results.

The Full Salvation of the Triune God according to the Experience of Life

The word *salvation* in 1:5 denotes the full salvation of the Triune God. This means that it does not refer only to a part of our salvation, to that initial aspect of salvation that comes through the Savior, Jesus Christ. Rather, this is the full salvation of the Triune God, of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In this full salvation a great part is accomplished by the Father; another great part, by the Son; and yet another great part, by the Spirit. Therefore, this salvation is the full salvation of the Trinity of the Godhead.

The full salvation of the Triune God comprises many items in three stages. These stages are the initial stage, the progressing stage, and the completing stage. These three stages are not divided according to knowledge or merely according to objective aspects of God's salvation. On the contrary, these stages are arranged according to life. Spiritual life, as we all know, begins with regeneration, continues in transformation, and reaches maturity in the stage of consummation. Therefore, these three stages of salvation are divided according to the experience of life.

The Initial Stage

The initial stage, the stage of regeneration, is composed of redemption, sanctification (positional—v. 2; 1 Cor. 6:11), justification, reconciliation, and regeneration. Redemption, sanctification, justification, and reconciliation are all for regeneration. Regeneration is the totality of redemption, sanctification, justification, and reconciliation. Regeneration is the result of these four matters. In the stage of regeneration God has justified us through the redemption of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26), and He has regenerated us in our spirit with His life by His Spirit (John 3:3-6). Thus, we have received God's eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9) and His eternal life (John 3:15), and we have become His children (1:12-13), who shall not perish forever (10:28-29).

Eternal Life and Eternal Salvation

God has regenerated us in our spirit. The element, the substance, God used to regenerate us is His own life. Furthermore, this regeneration with God's life was

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accomplished by a person, that is, by God's Spirit. As a result of this regeneration, we have received God's eternal salvation and His eternal life. In this sense we have already received God's salvation. No one can deny that we have received God's salvation in its first stage. There is no need for us to grow unto this stage, and it is not necessary for us to wait until it is revealed to us. We have received two things that are eternal—eternal salvation and eternal life. This is not my teaching, theology, or opinion; it is the revelation of God's pure Word.

Because we have been regenerated and have received God's eternal salvation and eternal life, we have become God's children. As children of God, we shall never perish. This truth should strengthen us and keep us from the erroneous teaching that says if we sin after we have been saved, we shall perish. That teaching is nonsensical and is absolutely not according to the truth. Once we have received God's eternal salvation, we are saved forever, for eternity. God's eternal salvation is not dispensational; it is not temporary. Because it is an eternal salvation, we shall never perish.

Saved from Condemnation and Perdition

This initial salvation of God has saved us from God's condemnation and from eternal perdition (3:18, 16). However, although this initial salvation saves us from God's condemnation and from eternal perdition, it does not save us from God's discipline. During our lifetime God will discipline us and may even punish us. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul indicates that God judges, disciplines, and even punishes the believers. This does not mean, however, that those who are disciplined by God will lose their salvation. According to Scripture, on the one hand, we have been saved for eternity. We shall never be condemned by God, and we shall never perish. On the other hand, while we are living on earth in the flesh, God will deal with us and discipline us. Sometimes He may even judge us or punish us. By this we see that through the initial stage of God's salvation, we receive eternal salvation and eternal life. Although we shall never perish, we may experience God's discipline during our lifetime. But it is altogether contrary to the Bible to teach that to be disciplined by God means that we shall lose our salvation.

God may punish us for certain things, but we have been saved for eternity and we shall never lose this eternal salvation.

The Progressing Stage

The second stage of God's full salvation, the progressing stage, is the stage of transformation. This stage is composed of freedom from sin, sanctification (mainly dispositional—Rom. 6:19, 22), growth in life, transformation, building up, and maturing. The sanctification

in this stage is mainly dispositional, although there is still an amount of positional sanctification. In the first stage sanctification is altogether positional; in the second stage sanctification is mainly dispositional.

In this stage of transformation God is freeing us from the dominion of indwelling sin—the law of sin and of death—by the law of the Spirit of life through the effectiveness of the death of Christ working subjectively in us (vv. 6-7; 7:16-20; 8:2). In the second stage God is also sanctifying us by His Holy Spirit (15:16), with His holy nature, through His discipline (Heb. 12:10) and His judgment in His own house (1 Pet. 4:17). God is now sanctifying us by a person, and this person is the Holy Spirit. The element, the substance, that God uses to sanctify us is His holy nature. The means through which we are sanctified is God's discipline and judgment, the judgment He exercises in governing His own house.

Maturing in the Divine Life

In the progressing stage of salvation God is also causing us

to grow in His life (1 Cor. 3:6-7). He is transforming us by renewing the inward parts of our soul by the life-giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6, 17-18; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) through the working together of all things (Rom. 8:28). He is building us together into a spiritual house for His dwelling (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:22), and He is maturing us in His life (Rev. 14:15) for the completion of His full salvation.

In the first stage of God's salvation we are saved from God's condemnation and from eternal perdition. But in the second stage we are being delivered from the power of sin, the world, the flesh, the self, the soul-life (the natural life), and individualism. Therefore, in this stage we are in the process of being delivered from so many negative things. The goal of this deliverance is that we would have maturity in the divine life for the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose.

The Completing Stage

The third stage of God's full salvation, the completing stage, is the stage of consummation. This stage is composed of the redemption (transfiguration) of our body, conformity to the Lord, glorification, inheritance of God's kingdom, participation in Christ's kingship, and the topmost enjoyment of the Lord. These matters are beyond our present experience. They will be revealed to us in the future. Although we have experienced the first stage of salvation and are now in the second stage, the third stage is still far beyond us. The items in this stage will be revealed at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus.

The Transfiguration of Our Body

In the completing stage of salvation, God will redeem our fallen and corrupted body (Rom. 8:23) by transfiguring it into the body of Christ's glory (Phil. 3:21). He will conform us to the glorious image of His firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29), making us holy and absolutely like Him in our regenerated spirit, transformed soul, and transfigured body. He will also glorify us (v. 30), immersing us in His glory (Heb. 2:10) that we may enter into His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:11), into which He has called us (1 Thes. 2:12), and inherit it as the topmost portion of His blessing (James 2:5; Gal. 5:21), even to reign with Christ, to be His co-kings, participating in His kingship over the nations (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6; 2:26-27; 12:5) and sharing His royal, kingly joy in His divine government (Matt. 25:21, 23). Our body will be freed from the slavery of corruption of the old creation into the freedom of the glory of God's new creation (Rom. 8:21), and our soul will be delivered out of the realm of trials and

sufferings (1 Pet. 1:6; 4:12; 3:14; 5:9) into a new realm, full of glory (4:13; 5:10). In this new realm we shall share and enjoy all that the Triune God is, has, and has accomplished, attained, and obtained.

This is the salvation of our souls that is ready to be revealed to us at the last time. This is also the grace that will be brought to us at the unveiling of Christ in glory (1:13; Matt. 16:27; 25:31). Furthermore, this is the end of our faith (1 Pet. 1:9). The power of God is able to guard us unto this so that we may obtain it. Therefore, we should eagerly expect such a marvelous salvation (Rom. 8:23), and we should prepare ourselves for its splendid revelation (v. 19). Hallelujah for the full salvation of the Triune God in its three stages!

The Constant Salvation in Our Practical Life

According to the book of Philippians, there is a salvation that is constant in our practical life. To say that this salvation is constant means that it is a salvation we may experience every day, every hour, and every moment.

In the second stage we are being delivered from the power of sin, the world, the flesh, the self, the soul-life, and individualism. The goal of this deliverance is maturity in the divine life for the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose.

A Subjective Salvation for Magnifying Christ

In Philippians 1 and 2 Paul uses the word *salvation* twice. In 1:19 he says, "I know that for me this will turn out to salvation." In 2:12 he says to the saints in Philippi, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The salvation in 1:19 denotes the salvation that Paul experienced during his imprisonment in Rome. A typical Jew, he was held a prisoner in Rome, far from his native land. Using today's terms, Paul was held captive by the Roman imperialists. It certainly was a shameful, dishonorable thing for a Jew to be held in a Roman prison. Most of the time, Paul was probably chained to a guard. It certainly must have been an insult for an educated upper-class Jew to be chained to a guard in a Roman prison. It was also dishonorable for such an apostle of the Lord Jesus to be imprisoned in such a way. Nevertheless, Paul testified that his situation would turn out to him for salvation.

In 1:19 Paul is not referring to eternal salvation, the salvation from hell and the judgment of God. That salvation is objective. What Paul has in mind here is a very subjective,

experiential salvation, a salvation experienced not once for all, but moment by moment.

When Paul said that he expected his situation to turn out for his salvation, he did not have in mind release from prison. Some readers of the book of Philippians may think that Paul's expectation was that, through the prayers of the saints, especially those in Philippi, he would be released from prison. However, according to the grammatical construction of 1:19-21, this cannot be the meaning of salvation here. The salvation in verse 19 is related to Paul's word in verse 20 about not being put to shame in anything and about Christ being magnified in his body, whether through life or through death. Hence, in verse 20 we have the definition of the salvation mentioned in verse 19. Therefore, salvation here consists of not being put to shame in anything, but of magnifying Christ in everything.

Salvation here certainly does not mean release from prison. Instead, it means that, no matter how difficult Paul's situation was and no matter how insulting, he would

prison may have been astonished and amazed. Perhaps Paul even testified to the jailer that he was happy in the Lord and rejoiced in Him. Possibly Paul's enjoyment of Christ in prison may have been a factor in bringing Onesimus, a runaway slave, to salvation. Anyone who observed Paul in prison would have seen a man praising the Lord and rejoicing.

When Paul was imprisoned in Philippi, he and Silas sang praises to the Lord (Acts 16:23-26). To be sure, the Philippian believers knew of Paul's experience there in prison. They knew that the praises of Paul and Silas brought in a great earthquake. No doubt, while in prison in Rome, Paul also exercised himself to sing praises to the Lord. Far from being found complaining or weeping, he could be found rejoicing in the Lord, singing praises to Him, and testifying concerning Him. This is constant salvation.

Enjoying a Constant Salvation to Live Christ

Many of us have been Christians for years, but we have never heard anything about this constant salvation. We knew, of course, about eternal salvation. That kind of salvation is objective. I wish to make it very clear that I certainly do not belittle eternal salvation in any way. I treasure it and deeply appreciate it. In His eternal salvation God has rescued us from hell and from His righteous judgment. But day by day we need to go on to experience a constant salvation in our practical life. When Paul was in prison, what he enjoyed was not simply God's eternal salvation with the hope it afforded him; he also enjoyed a constant salvation hour by hour. To enjoy this salvation is to live Christ. Actually, to live Christ is to enjoy constant salvation in our daily life. Every aspect of God's salvation brings us out of something on the negative side and ushers us into something on the positive side. Negatively, Paul was saved from being put to shame; positively, Christ was magnified in him. What a wonderful salvation!

Saved from Ordinary Things

In 2:12 Paul tells the saints in Philippi, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The constant salvation in 1:19 is for a particular person in a particular situation, whereas the constant salvation in 2:12 is for all believers in common situations. We have seen that the salvation in 1:19 saved Paul in the particular situation of his imprisonment in such a way that he would not be put to shame but instead would magnify Christ. Now we need to see that, according to the context of 2:12, constant salvation is also for the believers to be saved from ordinary things in their daily living.

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not be put to shame in anything. Rather, Christ would be magnified in his body. Not even being chained to a guard would hinder Paul from magnifying Christ. This is what we mean by constant salvation.

Actually, the word *constant* is not adequate to describe the salvation in 1:19. All our words are related to our culture. If a certain matter does not exist in our culture, we shall not have a word for it. The salvation here is altogether wonderful and marvelous, and no word is sufficient to describe it fully. Not even in prison would Paul be put to shame. Instead of being put to shame, he knew that he would magnify Christ. This was Paul's salvation.

Suppose that instead of rejoicing in the Lord, Paul wept about his situation and complained, saying, "I'm an educated Jew and also an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, called, commissioned, and sent by Him. Now I'm in prison chained to a guard. How terrible!" If Paul had wept and complained, he would have been put to shame. However, Paul did not weep or complain. On the contrary, he rejoiced in the Lord. Anyone who visited him in

From verses 14 and 15 we see that these things include murmurings, reasonings, blame, guile, blemishes, crookedness, perverseness, and darkness. These are general characteristics of the condition of fallen man everywhere. No matter where we may be, there will be murmuring, reasoning, blame, guile, blemishes, crookedness, perverseness, and darkness. These may be found not only in society generally but even in the family life of believers. It is common for wives to murmur and for husbands to reason. A wife may complain about something, and her husband may vindicate himself. Then neither the wife nor the husband is blameless, and both may also have guile and blemishes. At times, a husband and wife are also crooked and perverted in their dealings with each other. Who can say that he has never been crooked in his relationships with others? Even children may be crooked in relation to their own parents. Although we have received God's eternal salvation, to a certain extent we may still be crooked, not altogether honest and straightforward in certain matters. Thus, we need a constant salvation with respect to all the negative things in verses 14 and 15.

Paul tells us that we need to work out our own salvation. By working out this salvation we shall be saved from murmurings, reasonings, blame, guile, blemishes, crookedness, perverseness, and darkness. To be sure, it is not easy to be saved from such things. Paul deliberately used these words to indicate the fallen condition common to all.

Holding Forth the Word of Life

However, just as the salvation in 1:19 has both a negative side and a positive side, the salvation in 2:12 has two sides. The negative side is in verses 14 and 15; the positive side is in verse 16, where Paul speaks of "holding forth the word of life." The Greek word rendered *holding forth* means "to apply, present, offer." To hold forth the word of life is to present it to others and offer it to them, applying it to them in their situation. Wherever we may be, we need to hold forth the word of life; we need to present the word of life to others. What we offer to those around us should not be words of murmuring or reasoning, nor anything related to crookedness or perverseness. We should offer nothing other than the word of life. To hold forth the word of life is identical to living Christ. Whenever we live Christ, we hold forth the word of life. Once again we see that the book of Philippians is a book on the experience of Christ and a book also on living Christ. What Paul wrote in this Epistle is related to the experience of Christ and to living Christ.

I hope that we all shall be deeply impressed with the need to enjoy constant salvation in our practical life day by day. We need a salvation that we can term our own

salvation. This salvation saves us not from hell, nor even merely from sin, but from murmurings, reasonings, blame, guile, blemishes, crookedness, perverseness, and darkness. When we experience this salvation, we spontaneously hold forth, present, apply, the word of life to those around us. This is to live Christ.

Particular Situations and Common Situations

In Philippians 1 and 2 we see a constant salvation that is, on the one hand, for a particular person in a particular situation and, on the other hand, for all believers in the common situations of daily life. Under God's sovereignty we may become a person in a particular situation. Paul became such a person when he was imprisoned in Rome. Imprisonment caused him to be a person in a particularly difficult situation. But being a person in that kind of situation afforded him an excellent opportunity to experience and enjoy constant salvation. We may also find ourselves in particular situations. For example, a brother may suddenly find himself without a job. This brother needs the salvation in 1:19.

Imprisonment caused Paul to be a person in a particularly difficult situation. But being a person in that kind of situation afforded him an excellent opportunity to experience and enjoy constant salvation.

Most of the time our situation is rather common, ordinary. As we have pointed out, the daily situation of fallen man includes murmurings, reasonings, and many other negative things. In our married life we need a constant salvation in order to be rescued from murmurings and reasonings. We also need a constant salvation in order to be rescued from crookedness and perverseness. For example, a brother may not be honest or straightforward in dealing with his wife. Thus, he needs a present, constant salvation. If he does not experience this salvation, there will be no way for him to hold forth the word of life. Day by day we need a constant salvation to save us from anything that is not Christ. This salvation brings us into a condition where spontaneously we live Christ. Then in our living we shall present the word of life to others. This word of life held forth by us also is Christ. For this reason, to hold forth the word of life is to live Christ.

Paul knew the situation of fallen man. In Philippians 1 he presents his own case as an illustration of God's constant salvation. Then in chapter 2 he shows that this salvation is for all believers in the common situations of

daily life. Although the salvation in 1:19 may not always apply to you specifically in your circumstances, you cannot deny your need for the salvation in 2:12. You may not be a particular person with a particular case, but you certainly are an ordinary person in a common situation. In ordinary daily life we all are bothered by murmurings, reasonings, crookedness, and even perverseness. Thus, we need a constant salvation day by day.

What It Means to Live Christ

We need this salvation not only to bring us out of negative things, but also to bring us into a glorious condition of presenting the word of life to those around us. The salvation in 1:19 brings us into a state where Christ is magnified in us, and the salvation in 2:12 brings us into a condition where we hold forth the living Christ as the word of life to others. To have this salvation, which we need daily and hourly, is to live Christ in a practical way.

Do you know what it means to live Christ? To live Christ means that no matter what our circumstances may be,

Although we cannot share in Christ's redemption, we need to be partners with Him in His human living, especially in His emptying Himself, humbling Himself, and in His not grasping equality with God as a treasure.

Christ is magnified in us and we are not put to shame in anything. Hence, the salvation in 1:19 is equal to living Christ. To enjoy and experience this salvation is to live Christ. Furthermore, to live Christ also means that in our daily life we are saved from murmurings, reasonings, crookedness, and perverseness and that we present our living Lord as the word of life to those whom we meet day by day. What a tremendous salvation! We all need this daily, constant salvation, a salvation that is nothing other than Christ Himself.

The Divine and Rich Provision for Our Constant Salvation

In 2:5-16 Paul not only speaks of constant salvation and its source but also shows us the divine and rich provision for this salvation. For the working out of our own salvation we need this provision. In 2:5-11 we have a record of Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and exaltation. However, here nothing is said about Christ's redemption. It seems that in these verses Paul purposely does not refer to the redemption of Christ. His purpose is to present the

Lord Jesus and His incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and exaltation in such a way as to give us a pattern for our daily salvation. Christ alone was qualified to accomplish redemption. We cannot share in this work. It would be blasphemy to say that we participate in the accomplishing of redemption. We enjoy Christ's redemption, but we cannot participate in Christ's work of redemption.

The Pattern and the Standard

Although we cannot share in Christ's redemption, we need to be partners with Him in His human living, especially in His emptying Himself, humbling Himself, and in His not grasping equality with God as a treasure. Although the Lord subsisted in the form of God and was equal to God, He did not consider this equality a treasure to be grasped and retained. He did not insist on holding on to the form of God, but was willing to empty Himself by laying aside the form of God and putting on the form of a slave. We all should be partners with Christ in this self-emptying. This means that instead of grasping what we have, we should lay these things aside and empty ourselves.

After Christ emptied Himself, becoming in the likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself to such an extent that He was obedient even unto the death of a cross. Then God raised Him from among the dead and highly exalted Him. Here we have not only a pattern for our constant salvation, but also the standard for this salvation. The pattern includes Christ's experience from incarnation through crucifixion; the standard includes His experience from resurrection to exaltation. Daily we need to enjoy a salvation that has such a pattern and standard.

Suppose the wife of a certain brother gives him a difficult time. The way for him to be saved in this situation is not to insist on his headship or on her subordination. He should not regard himself as a king and her as a subject. Neither should he use Ephesians 5:22 to insist that she submit to him. To do this would be to grasp his headship, his "husbandship." This would not be in keeping with the principle that the Lord did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. Although it is difficult for one who has the headship to lay it aside, this is just what the brother must do in order to experience the Lord's constant salvation. Of course, the brother can be saved by the inward operation of God. However, 2:5-8 comes before God's operation, which is in verse 13. Surely God will operate in the brother to save him. Nevertheless, he must be willing to empty himself and lay aside his headship according to the pattern in 2:5-8. However, in most cases, a married brother grasps his

headship and refuses to lay it aside. This may give rise to murmurs, reasonings, and bitter exchange of words. The brother here should contact the Lord Jesus and say, "Lord, You did not grasp equality with God, and I do not grasp my headship. Neither do I insist on my position as a husband. By Your gracious mercy, I lay aside my headship." Simply by doing this, he experiences the first step of God's constant salvation. Now he must go on to experience the rest by humbling himself, even unto death. Instead of feeling resentment toward his wife for having to lay aside his headship, he should humble himself before her. This is to experience the pattern of constant salvation from incarnation to the death of the cross. If the brother experiences this, God will come in to raise him up and to exalt him. Then the brother will also experience the standard of God's instant salvation. As a result, his wife may be humbled, troubled by the fact that she has been giving him a difficult time. Instead of reacting to her in a negative way, her husband emptied himself and humbled himself. Now she realizes that in his experience of Christ he is exalted and enthroned. He has experienced constant salvation with its pattern and standard.

In 2:5-16 we see how to work out our own salvation. We see also the source and the power for a constant salvation. As we consider the pattern and the standard found here, we see that we need to be partners with Christ in His pattern and standard. This is the first aspect of the divine and rich provision for our constant salvation.

The Operating God

When I was young, I learned that in 2:5-11 there are seven steps in the Lord's humiliation: emptying Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men, humbling Himself, becoming obedient, being obedient unto death, and being obedient unto the death of a cross. I was also taught that, as Christians, we should follow the Lord Jesus in these steps. However, the more I tried to follow Him and imitate Him, the more my fallen nature was exposed. I realized from my experience that the traditional teaching of imitating Christ does not work, for I simply did not have a nature that could follow the Lord in this way. The Lord Jesus was God incarnate, a God-man, a man with the divine element. How could I, a fallen human being, one who lacked even the proper human element and entirely lacked the divine element, follow this God-man? The Lord Jesus has both the divine element and the proper human element. Although He put aside the form of God, He never laid aside the nature of God. The reality, essence, substance, of the divine nature was still in Him. Thus, He was a man filled with the divine element. He could pass through the seven steps of His humiliation. However, I could not imitate Him.

Gradually I began to understand that to follow the Lord Jesus according to Philippians 2, we need to have God operating within us. In ourselves we are not able to follow the divine pattern or reach God's standard. Praise the Lord that God is working in us! The very God who became incarnate in the Lord Jesus is now in us. Through incarnation, this eternal God came to live in the Lord Jesus. He made Jesus a pattern and uplifted Him according to the divine standard. Now this same God is operating in us. When I first realized this, I was overjoyed. Because God is operating in me, I am now a God-man. All genuine believers in Christ need to see that, as Christians, we are God-men. No longer need we live according to our fallen humanity, for God is now operating in us. Hallelujah, because God dwells in us and is operating in us, we are God-men! This inward operation of God is the second aspect of the divine and rich provision for constant salvation.

Children of God

The third aspect is that we are children of God (v. 15).

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God made Jesus a pattern and uplifted Him according to the divine standard.
Now this same God is operating in us.

Because we have proclaimed this truth, some have falsely accused us of teaching evolution into God. We certainly do not teach evolution into God. According to the Bible, we testify the fact that, as children of God, we have been born of God. Just as an offspring of a dog has the life and nature of a dog, and a child has the life and nature of his parents, so as children of God, we have God's life and nature.

If we were not children of God with the divine life and nature, we could not understand God's operation within us or cooperate with it. Our cooperation with God's operation can be compared to a three-legged race. In such a race, each person has one leg free and the other bound to one of his partner's legs. It is impossible for a human being to run a three-legged race tied to an animal, because an animal does not have the life and nature to cooperate with a human being. Figuratively speaking, because we have the divine life and nature, we are running a three-legged race with God as our partner. Paul says, "He who is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). After our God came through incarnation, lived on earth to establish a pattern

of salvation, was crucified, and was raised and exalted according to the divine standard, He became the life-giving Spirit (15:45). As such a Spirit, He has entered into us and now dwells in us as the all-inclusive processed God. His operation within us is based on the fact that He has regenerated us and deposited into us His divine life with the divine nature. This is the greatest wonder in the universe! After setting up the pattern and establishing the standard, God put His life and nature into us. Now He is motivating, operating, and energizing within by His divine life and nature according to the pattern with the standard. When we call on the Lord or pray to the Father, we experience this inner operation.

We have seen that the first aspect of the divine provision for our constant salvation is the pattern with the standard and that the second aspect is the inward operation of the God who became incarnate, died on the cross, and was resurrected and exalted. This God has come into us to live out this pattern in us. First, He regenerated us, imparting His divine life with the divine nature into us to make us God-men, children of God. Now He dwells in

Because we have been regenerated of the Spirit, we have the divine life, the divine nature, and even the divine person, God Himself, dwelling in our spirit. Now we need to exercise our spirit when we come to the Word.

us to operate in us continually. Because we have the indwelling God operating in us, Hebrews 8:11 says, "They shall by no means each teach his fellow citizen and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all will know Me from the little one to the great one among them." Because God is operating in us, we know what He wants to do and what we should do. For example, when a brother's wife gives him a difficult time, he does not need a pastor to instruct him. Through the operating God he knows that he should lay aside his headship and, according to the pattern of the Lord Jesus, be willing to serve her as a slave.

Shining as Luminaries

In Philippians 2:15 Paul says that we "shine as luminaries in the world." The Greek word rendered *luminaries* denotes celestial bodies that reflect the light of the sun. As children of God with the divine life and nature, we have a special function—the function of shining. Because we have the divine life and nature, we have become luminaries reflecting Christ as the real sun. Whenever we cooperate with God's inward operation according to

the divine life and nature, we shine with the light of Christ. This is the fourth aspect of the divine and rich provision for constant salvation.

The Word of Life

The fifth aspect is found in the phrase *holding forth the word of life* (v. 16). In 1:19 we have the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and in 2:16 we have the word of life. Between them we have the pattern of salvation with its standard, the operating God, the children of God with the divine life and nature, and the function of reflecting the light of Christ. What a tremendous provision! With such a rich provision we can be saved constantly.

We thank the Lord for two great gifts—the Spirit and the Word, the Bible. Every child of God must learn how to get into the Word of God by the divine life and nature. This is to contact the Scriptures by exercising our spirit to touch the indwelling God. Such contact, based on the divine life and nature, is very different from reading the Bible merely with the exercise of the mind. Some

Christians analyze the Bible purely in a mental way, others emphasize the memorization of Bible verses, and still others, especially those with seminary training, expound the Word in a doctrinal way. If we approach the Bible only in these ways, we shall not touch the word of life. Instead, to us the Bible will be a book of knowledge, doctrine, teaching, and theology. Because we have been regenerated of the Spirit, we have the divine life, the divine nature, and even the divine person, God Himself, dwelling in our spirit. Now we need to exercise our spirit

whenever we come to the Word. If we do this, every line, phrase, and word of the Bible will become life to us. Because everything related to God is living, God's words must be living words, words of life. If we come to the Bible with a living spirit, spontaneously we shall enjoy the word of life. Then we shall be supplied, strengthened, quickened, enlightened, refreshed, nourished, and washed.

We have covered five aspects of the divine and rich provision for our constant salvation: the pattern with its standard, the inward operation of God, the children of God, the luminaries, and the word of life. If we enjoy all these aspects, we shall experience constant salvation. The One who set up the pattern and who Himself is the pattern now operates in us as the indwelling God. Through regeneration, we have become children of God with the divine life and nature. This makes us luminaries with the function of reflecting Christ. Furthermore, we have the word of life, and we may enter into this word, enjoy its riches, and declare it to those around us. In this way the negative things are defeated, and we enjoy the victory of constant salvation. **AC**