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**The Use of Philosophy to Justify the  
Doctrine of Salvation by Divine Grace**

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**Abstract**

This article is a philosophical and theological reflection on the means of salvation in Christianity. Salvation, the act of God condescending to the level of *humkinanity* to have a relationship with humankind, has long been a matter of controversy in Christian literature on soteriology. Whereas some believe in the ancient

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Christian doctrine of salvation by grace alone (sometimes known as *sola gratia* or *monergism*), others strongly argue that salvation is obtained by the co-operation between God and humanity (sometimes referred to as *synergism*). From a philosophical point of view, the article concludes that the ancient doctrine of *sola gratia* is philosophically justifiable. This paper stresses that salvation is entirely an act of God. He initiates it alone. No amount of human works can accomplish it. Salvation is a gift of grace from God to humanity. This gift purifies the human will so it would make a decision either to leave or remain in that relationship. While those who leave continue in their estrangement against God, those who remain cooperate with God in the process of sanctification.

Keywords: Salvation, grace, works, monergism, synergism.

### **Introduction**

Philosophy, a study of “the most basic beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual or group (Merriam-Webster, 2013, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/philosophy](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/philosophy))” is often thought of as contradicting established biblical doctrines or faith. For some, the gap between Philosophy and Theology, for example, are so wide that there cannot be any compromise between the two disciplines. Contrary to such popular opinion, this paper proposes that there are many instances in which Philosophy could be used to make biblical doctrine or faith systematic and plausible. In this particular paper, the authors attempt an investigation into ways by which Philosophy can be used to justify the doctrine of salvation by divine grace.

In order to achieve this aim, the article raises some metaphysical questions about the topic: how did the doctrine of salvation by divine grace emerge? What is salvation? What is grace? How is salvation achieved? The authors provide seriously thought through answers to these questions with the intention of philosophically reflecting on the relationship between divine grace and salvation.

### **A. Grace and Salvation in the Christian Experience**

The biblical perspective on grace and salvation has always been that the salvation of humanity is not possible without divine grace. In his letter to the Corinthians, Apostle Paul dilated this concept in 1 Cor 15:19-22 (NKJV).

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruit of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

However, some attempts were made by some Bible scholars to insert the concept of free will into this established doctrine of salvation by divine grace. One of such earliest attempts is attributed to Pelagius (AD 354 – AD 420/440). Pelagius believed that the power of choice embedded in the very fabric of humanity was enough to gain salvation (Schaff, 1980). Thus he taught that human beings are capable of living sinless lives independent of divine grace. The crux of his teachings was based on his notion that Adam and Eve's sins never plunged the whole human will into a perpetual state of corruption and guilt. Rather, the actions of Adam and Eve left a bad legacy for the whole human race. Therefore, he argues that we sin by choice and we become guilty. Hence, humanity has full control on whether to engage in sinful lifestyles or to cease from it and live a life of sinlessness. In short, as the sins of Adam and Eve provided a bad example for the whole humanity so Jesus Christ provides humanity with a good example. With these available good and bad options, individuals exercise their free will either to live a sinful life or to live a sinless life.

Pelagius' views were sharply contrasted by Augustine. Augustine practically taught that humanity's only hope to salvation was total dependence upon God.<sup>2</sup> He argues that

For not only has God given us our ability and helps it, but He even works [brings about] willing and acting in us; not that we do not will or that we do not act, but that without His help we neither will anything good nor do it.

Thus, it is divine grace that induces us to do good works. Augustine further notes

We are framed, therefore, that is, formed and created, in the good works which we have not ourselves prepared, but God has before ordained that we should walk in them. It follows, then, dearly beloved, beyond all doubt, that as your good life is nothing else than God's grace, so also the eternal life which is the recompense of a good life is the grace of God; moreover it is given

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<sup>2</sup> As cited by Father Most, 2014, [www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/AUGUSTIN.HTM](http://www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/AUGUSTIN.HTM).

gratuitously, even as that is given gratuitously to which it is given. But that to which it is given is solely and simply grace; this therefore is also that which is given to it, because it is its reward—grace is for grace...<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Augustine held that salvation is solely by divine grace and not based on anything that human beings could do for themselves.

In his *Summa Theological*, Aquinas seems to be endorsing Augustine's position on divine grace as being the sole vehicle for humanity's salvation. Aquinas (1948, p. 110) writes "grace is not limited to the forgiveness of sins, but signifies various gifts bestowed on man by God including God's causing good in the soul of the creature. Thus, grace implies something in the soul, which is God's love effecting new goodness in the soul of the creature."

Both the Pelagian and the Augustinian views run parallel until the Council of Orange in 529 AD was called to address the differences. The purpose of this council was to decide on whether salvation was *monergistic* (God alone) or *synergistic* (a co-operation of man and God). At the end, the Council of Orange endorsed the Augustinian position that apart from divine grace, humanity cannot be regenerated. To this end, Canons five (5) and six (6) of the council are significant to note.

CANON 5. If anyone says that not only the increase of faith but also its beginning and the very desire for faith, by which we believe in Him who justifies the ungodly and comes to the regeneration of holy baptism -- if anyone says that this belongs to us by nature and not by a gift of grace, that is, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit amending our will and turning it from unbelief to faith and from godlessness to godliness, it is proof that he is opposed to the teaching of the Apostles, for blessed Paul says, "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). And again, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). For those who state that the faith by which we believe in God is natural make all who are separated from the Church of Christ by definition in some measure believers.

CANON 6. If anyone says that God has mercy upon us when, apart from his grace, we believe, will, desire, strive, labour, pray, watch, study, seek, ask, or knock, but does not confess that it is by the infusion and inspiration of the Holy Spirit within us that we have the faith, the will, or the strength to do all these things as we ought; or if anyone makes the assistance of grace depend on the humility or obedience of man and does not agree that it is a gift of grace itself

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<sup>3</sup> As cited by Father Most, 2014, [www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/AUGUSTIN.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/AUGUSTIN.htm).

that we are obedient and humble, he contradicts the Apostle who says, "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7), and, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:10).

From its canons, the Council of Orange firmly rejected the Pelagian position. By such rejection, therefore, the Council re-echoed the established teaching on grace. Most importantly, it held that Adam and Eve's sin plunged the whole human race into a state of being in which none could choose the good. But God granted us grace and this grace enables us to be regenerated. Now this grace is not earned. Rather, it is bestowed on all humanity as a result of the kindness of God.

The results of the Council of Orange dominated Christian thoughts on salvation and grace until the Medieval period. During this period, the spiritual lives of Christians were dominated by two themes: dependence and superstition. According to McClarty (2007, p. 15)

Over time, Rome promoted a reliance on superstition and increased Scriptural ignorance. The Popes gained tremendous political and ecclesiastical power and eventually most of Europe fell under Rome's dominion. The morals of the church leadership grew increasingly wicked, as the priesthood became more corrupt, culminating in the selling of indulgences: payments made to reduce temporal punishment for sin, either in this life or on behalf of souls in Purgatory. The Church at Rome basked in practices derived from the mysterious religions of ancient Babylon, preferring ecclesiastical tradition over Christian doctrine. The Scriptures were effectively hidden from common people, being considered too "holy" and difficult for any but the high initiates of the clergy to read.

McClarty (2007, p. 15) further observes that

The Roman Catholic Church came to dominate both European politics and culture, and virtually every person depended on the church for eternal salvation. On the one hand, the church controlled and administered the seven sacraments which, it maintained, were the only means by which the saving grace of God might be dispensed. On the other hand, the church held the immense power of excommunication, which barred heretics and sinners from the saving grace of the sacraments, and the power of the interdict by which the Pope might bar from the sacraments an entire nation or people. These powerful tools rendered an entire European populace dependent on a wrathful God who expressed the divine will solely through the Roman church.

The result of such reliance upon superstition and dependence was the thought that human beings could work out their own salvation with or without the divine grace of God. It was against this backdrop that Martin Luther (1483-1546) picked up the theme of salvation by divine grace alone and expounded it elaborately. Basing on the biblical passage that “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph 2: 8, 9),” Luther believed that salvation is only gained through grace (*sola gratia*). Luther’s statement, as cited by Lenker (2000, p. 2), tells it all.

So he [Paul in Titus 3:5-7] discards all boasted free will, all human virtue, righteousness, and good works. He concludes that they are all nothing and are wholly perverted, however brilliant and worthy they may appear, and teaches that we must be saved solely by the grace of God, which is effective for all believers who desire it from a correct conception of their own ruin and nothingness.

Elsewhere, they quote Luther as stating that “He who does not receive salvation purely through grace, independently of all good works, certainly will never secure it (Lenker, 2000, p. 4).” Thus it could be seen that Luther’s purpose was to call attention to what had been the biblical view on how salvation is obtained—only through divine grace.

Later, individuals such as John Calvin (1509-1564), Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), and John Knox (1513-1572), (the *Reformers*), built on the foundation of Martin Luther. More importantly, these reformers attempted a systematic study of salvation by divine grace alone. During this same period, Arminius (1560-1609) re-introduced Pelagius’ views on universal grace and free will. He basically questioned the established view (that of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, etc.) on two counts. Firstly, was election by God to salvation conditional or unconditional? Secondly, was the grace of God resistible or irresistible? McClarty (2007, p. 17) notes Arminius thoughts on these questions in the following five (5) points.

1. God elects or reproves men on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief. In other words, God in His infinite wisdom looks down the long telescope of human history and sees in advance who will believe and who will not. God “chooses” or rejects them based on that knowledge.

2. Christ died for all men and for every man, although only believers are saved.
3. Man is so depraved that divine grace is necessary - leading to faith.
4. However, an individual may resist this grace.
5. Truly regenerate believers may lose their faith and thus lose their salvation.

The contention between Arminian and Calvinistic thoughts on how salvation is obtained was so deep that a forum was called on November 13, 1618, in Holland, to address the situation caused by the differences in theological thoughts on how salvation is obtained. This meeting has come to be referred to as the Synod of Dort. This Synod lasted until May 9, 1619. This Synod rejected the views of Arminius and the Remonstrant. In place of Arminius' views, the Council of Dort established the popular *five points of Calvinism*. These points have been presented as follows:

- T** Total Depravity or Total Inability
- U** Unconditional Election
- L** Limited Atonement
- I** Irresistible Grace
- P** Perseverance of the Saints

The reason for such a decision was that the Arminian view "...advance the superiority of man's will over God's rulership,...[and] appeal to man's desire to rule his own destiny. (McClarty, 2007, p. 19, word in bracket has been inserted by authors). Hence the Synod rejected the Arminius view and upheld the established Reform view. The council found this view to be consistent with the Bible, particularly with the Pauline passages.

### **B. The Meaning of Salvation**

The term "Salvation" is generally thought of as referring to the act of God in rescuing sinners from His righteous and holy judgment. Different views have been expressed by scholars and theologians on the word salvation (Baugh, 1992, p 331; Erickson, 2003, 846; Pinnock, 1989, 75). Salvation is the "act or state of deliverance from danger, especially deliverance by God from the penalty and power of sin" (Liefied, 1988, p 4: 288). The Hebrew Old Testament (OT) presents varied words and meanings for salvation such as *palat*

meaning deliverance (Psa 37:40), *āzār* meaning help or save (Psa 79:9), *hāyā* meaning to live (1 Sam 16:16), *gūal and pada* meaning redeeming someone through the payment of ransom (Psa 106:10). In the same sense, the New Testament (NT) Greek also presents different words designating salvation such as the verb *sozo* which occurs 107 times in the NT. *Sozo* means “to save,” “salvation,” “deliverance from condemnation,” “to cure,” “to keep alive,” “to pardon,” “benefit,” “preserving the inner being” etc (Foerster, 7:965-969). Briefly, the concept of salvation suggests an expression of God's grace in freeing humanity from dominance of sin and its consequences, transferring them to His kingdom (Col 1:13), and offering them everlasting life (Rom 6:23) (Demarest, 1997).

Salvation in theological thoughts is referred to as soteriology. It is from the Greek *soteria* meaning “salvation.” It is synonymous with concepts such as redemption and deliverance. According to Don F. Neufeld (1976, p 10: 1271), salvation is “the restoration of God’s image in the soul of man, the eradication of sin from the universe, the confirmation of God’s infinite love and justice to the eternal salvation of all created beings and the establishment of the universe and everlasting peace and security.” John M. Fowler (2005, p 29.) states that salvation implies “forgiveness for the past sins, empowerment to live a life of obedience now, and assurance for the future.” Through the grace of God and the salvation that He offers, humanity is redeemed from slavery to sin and the devil and are granted transformation through Jesus Christ. Although the Bible does not give detailed account about the formulation of the plan of salvation, nonetheless, humankind, have been given enough insight to help them recreate a picture of what took place when the plan of salvation was formulated (SDABC, 1980, 6:964).

The biblical fact is that humanity was perfect in the beginning, acted in ways that caused humanity to miss the bliss of observing the holy and just standard of God, and the result has been a total and perennial estrangement from God. In this state, the only way humanity can restore its original estate of perfection is deliverance from this state of estrangement. Demarest (1997) has noted that salvation includes three main stages. These are initial, progressive, and final stages of salvation.



Initial salvation refers to events of a person's conversion. This is synonymous to the idea of justification. Progressive salvation involves the spiritual trip a believer makes from conversion until death. This is the path that leads to eternal life (Demarest, 1997). This stage corresponds with Calvin's idea of sanctification. Lastly, there is final salvation, this is the ultimate stage involving the act of God saving believers at the final judgment. Salvation in this stage is sometimes referred to as "glorification." Truly, the instance of salvation suggests an unfortunate condition of humanity after sinning.

It all started with the sins of Adam and Eve. Sin (whether *peshac*, *chata*, or *hamartia*) suggests a situation in which the just and holy standard of the Lord has been missed. Therefore, by their disobedience, Adam and Eve missed God's standard and ushered in the perpetual state of total hostility and estrangement between God and humanity. The Bible recognises this. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all have sinned (Rom 5:12)."

Plunged in such a depraved state, Adam and Eve passed on such depravity to their descendants. Henceforth, humanity was dipped in a state of corruption wherein what appeared even just deeds became as filthy rags in the estimation of a holy and just God (Isa 64: 6). The canker of sin was so endemic that the divine description of the immediate descendants of Adam and Eve, as expressed in Gen 6: 5, was that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

The adverse effect of sin is also extensive (Rom 3: 23). In this depravation, not even a newly born baby is left out (Ps 51: 5; 58: 3). Thus human beings are not sinners because they sin. Rather, they are sinners because they have been born that way. The Bible attests to this notion severally in its inspired pages.

This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead (Eccl 9:3).

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jer 17:9)

The seriousness of this condition of humanity is that they are unable to deliver themselves or each other from this predicament of

corruption. Try as they could, they are still in the state of depravity and inability. Biblically, any attempt to choose righteously is and will be a failure. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil (Jer 13:23).” Such a state of depravity and helplessness suggest the need for an external help in order to restore humanity to the perfection it had from the beginning. This external assistance is couched in the love of God and it comes to all humanity as a gift of grace (John 3: 16). Thus at the core of Christianity is the truth that in order for humanity to escape sin and its effects, the relationship between God and humanity ought to be restored. God reached out to humanity so this could be realised. This is because humanity could not save itself. Salvation, therefore, is God condescending to the level of humanity in order to restore it to a perfect relationship with Himself.

#### **D. Human Depravity and Grace**

The doctrine of grace lies at the very core of Christianity. It appears that it is this concept alone that radically distinguishes Christianity from other world religions. Because most theologians have rendered the Hebrew word *hhen* as “unmerited favour,” the real emotional import of the Hebrew term seems to be inadequately conveyed (Benner, 2001, p. 4). A study of how the term is paralleled with other terms in given passages offers a better way for the accurate understanding of it. To this end, Benner (2001, p. 3) has suggested that the

Hebrew verb is paralleled with such ideas as healing, help, being lifted up, finding refuge, strength and salvation (literally rescue). From a concrete Hebraic perspective,  $\text{חָנַן}$  ( ) means all of this, which we can sum up with “providing protection.”

Benner (2001, p. 4) further notes that when the term is paralleled with words such as “beauty,” the term tends to induce grateful responses from beneficiaries or recipients of grace. It seems such an idea underlines the real meaning of grace. According to Berkhof (1949, p. 426) “the word is expressive of the emotion awakened in the heart of the recipient of such favour, and thus acquires the meaning “gratitude” or “thankfulness.” Extending such underpinnings to the Greek *charis*, Easton (1930, p. 1291) notes that “concretely, *charis* may mean the act by which graciousness is expressed,” as well as an instance for the expression of thankfulness

for a blessing. Hence the term is rightly perceived both as a gift and a gratitude for benefitting from such gift.

In the context of grace, then, salvation comes to all human beings as a gift (Easton, 1930, p. 1291). The Bible dominantly holds this notion (cf. Eph 2: 8; John 4:10; Acts 15:11; Rom 3:24; Rom 9:16; Eph 2:5; Heb 6:4; 1 Pet 1:5).

### **E. Grace, Works, and Salvation**

In Christian Theology, the idea of salvation of humanity is well established. Thus there appear almost no controversy on this subject since an idea against it may amount to an outright denial of the Christian Faith. However, there are controversies on how salvation is obtained. Basically, there are two main stance on this subject: those who aver that salvation is solely the work of God (divine grace) as against those who argue that salvation is the work of both God and human beings (universal grace and human free will). These stance have spun several centuries. Today, theological terms have been coined for these contradicting stance: monergism and synergism.

Monergism is a term that has been introduced into English from two main Greek words: *mono* and *ergon*. The former means “one, single, or alone” while the latter means “work.” Together, the term means the work of one (Hendryx, 2003). In Christian Theology, the term is descriptive of the group that holds that “the grace of God is the only efficient cause in beginning and effecting conversion (Fry, 1984, p. 729).” Thus proponents of this monergistic view of salvation generally consider humanity to be in a state of depravity and inability. They argue that without divine grace, humanity can never obtain salvation. Hendryx (2003) has attempted to simplify the monergistic argument below

Monergism simply means that it is God who gives ears to hear and eyes to see. It is God alone who gives illumination and understanding of His word that we might believe; It is God who raises us from the dead, who circumcises the heart; unplugs our ears; It is God alone who can give us a new sense that we may, at last, have the moral capacity to behold His beauty and unsurpassed excellency....

Very simply, then, monergism is the doctrine that our new birth (or "quickenings") is the work of God, the Holy Spirit alone, with no contribution and without the cooperation of fallen man, since the natural man, of himself, has no dvation [*sic*]. As long as we think we

contributed something, even a little bit (like good intentions) then we still think deep down that God saves us for something good he sees in us over our neighbour. But this is clearly not the case. Only Jesus makes us to differ from anyone else. We are all sinners and can boast in nothing before God, including the desire for faith in Christ (Phil 1:29; Eph 2:8; 2 Tim 2:25).

Among other scriptural passages, proponents of the monergistic view base much of their argument on Eph 2: 8, 9; John 15: 5; 1 Cor 12: 3; Rom 8:6-8; and Phil 2: 12, 13.

In contrast to the monergistic view, there is another group of theologians who hold on to the view that salvation actually follows human beings' decision to accept it or not. This theological position is referred to as *synergism*. Synergism, like its opposite monergism, consists of two Greek words: *syn* and *erg*. *Syn* means "together" and *erg* means "work." Thus it has been generally defined as "...two or more agents working together to produce a result not obtainable by any of the agents independently ([http://www.monergism.com/what\\_is\\_monergism.php](http://www.monergism.com/what_is_monergism.php))." In Christian Theology, it refers to the position that cooperation between humanity and God is required before mankind can obtain salvation. After all, humanity must choose or reject the divine offer of salvation. This certainly implies that humanity has an infinitesimal part to play in the plan of salvation. Oden (1994, p. 252) cites John Wesley's statement in this regard, "this is not a statement about natural ability, or about nature as such working of itself, but about grace working through nature" as crystalizing this view point. Biblically, the synergistic position appears to find its basis in Heb 13: 5 as well as John 3: 36.

The two contradictory positions, notwithstanding, how do we explain the means to salvation? Is it solely God's work accomplished on humanity's behalf, or that humanity cooperates with God in accomplishing it? Certainly, the means to salvation cannot be both ways. There can be only one.

### **Reflections**

For the time being, let it be assumed that humanity has significant role to play in the plan of salvation. Humanity must choose God and good over evil. In this case, then, God's grace alone is not sufficient for obtaining salvation. Rather, the means to salvation becomes a godly offer which humanity must either accept or reject. This is better

expressed as "Men have work to do if they would obtain salvation." (Doctrines of salvation, vol.3, p. 91). Such idea will make Christianity no different from other world religions.

Granted the truth of the idea that humanity first chooses God before salvation is given by God through grace, then, how do we know the exact amount of human works to be done in order for humanity to obtain salvation? Certainly, were human works a requirement for accomplishing salvation, one would normally expect the Bible to set the standard for both the quantity and quality of human works needed for such a purpose. But we do not find such considerations in the Bible. Rather, the Bible concerns itself with the work of Christ in humanity's behalf (1 Cor 3: 11)—an indication that no amount of human work can qualify humanity to have a right relationship with God. Paul adds that "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5, NKJV)." However, human works become necessary after a right relationship with God has been wrought. It is worthy to note that in the restoration of a right relationship with God, humanity performs no part in it. In other words, unless humanity is restored into right relationship with God, the human will can neither choose God nor bring about anything that is good enough to stand in the presence of a holy and righteous God. The words of the Bible are very relevant to the discussion. "You did not choose Me, but I chose you... (John 15: 16, NKJV)." More poignantly, the Bible sums up this thought "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4: 10, NKJV)." Thus in humanity's estrangement with God, human will can neither choose God nor love Him, let alone to cooperate with Him to accomplish salvation.

This brings us to the question of the intensity of sin. Briefly, it could be asked 'how deep did sin affect humanity?' Though there appears to be no catalogue of the effects of sin on humanity in the Bible, the biblical record of events following the fall offers an indepth insight into this subject. Among other happenings, the once cherished relationship between God and humanity was marked by shame, fear, and total estrangement (Gen 3: 8-10). In this regard, the *Seventh-day-Adventist Believe* (2006, p. 103) states that

Adam and Eve's first son committed murder. Their descendants soon violated the sacred marriage union by engaging in polygamy, and it was not long before wickedness and violence filled the earth...The history of the race after the flood is, with few exceptions, a sad account of the out-workings of the sinfulness of human nature.

Hence it becomes clear that the history of humanity itself gives ample evidence that in and of itself, humanity can neither choose God nor please God in its estrangement. Yet, some argue that in such estrangement, humanity first choose to accept God and His offer. This argument suggests that the human will have enough good to turn it to doing God's will. Obviously, such conclusion cannot be substantiated by Scriptures. Through the words of Paul, the Bible makes it clear that

For those who live according to the flesh set the minds on the things of the flesh...for to be carnally minded is death...Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom 8: 5-8, NKJV).

Salvation, a restoration of a right relationship between God and humanity, can never be brought about by the will of humanity. The only way this will happen is by the act of God—He reaching out to the level of humanity with the object of restoring humanity into relationship with Him. It is after God had reached out that humanity responds either in the positive or negative. Yet, salvation (God reaching out to humanity) is solely the act of God, without any contribution, whatsoever, from humanity. This is because no human works can bring down God to the level of humanity. He must reach out himself—this is salvation in its initial stage (justification).

Indeed a right view of salvation introduces grace into the discussion. As an unmerited favour, the act of God condescending to the level of humanity is unconditional. This is because it is not based on anything that humanity has done or will ever do. Salvation is a gift that is solely initiated by God. Thus to say that the will of humanity must act before grace is imparted by God is to distort the right view of grace. It is this gift of God that purifies the will of humanity for it to choose Him and to walk in His ways. But that is not the only meaning of grace. As already noted, grace is both a gift and an appreciation expressed for benefitting from that gift. Thus grace, as expressed in God's act of restoring humanity into relationship with Him, purifies

the human will before it can choose God and continue enduring in a relationship with Him.

Stated in another way, human will becomes active in the second stage of salvation—progressive or sanctification. Here, human will either chooses to remain or leave the relationship to which it has been restored. Those who leave will continue to be estranged from God. But those who remain in relationship with God, work corporately with God in this respect. Brakel (1999) agrees with this conclusion. He states that “Man, being thus moved by the influence of God’s Spirit, moves, *sanctifies himself*, engages in that activity which his new nature desires and is inclined toward, and does that which he knows to be his duty (p. 4).” Similarly DeYoung (2014) is of the view that “growing in godliness is hard work. There is no place for sloth. We must exert ourselves to obedience with speed and diligence. The believer is anything but passive in sanctification.” Therefore, a proper understanding of salvation by grace must put human works into correct perspective—for human works is a response in gratitude to the gift of God that it did not deserve and yet received.

### Conclusion

In sum, the logical arguments from the reflections have shown that the ancient and biblical doctrine of salvation by divine grace is philosophically justifiable. Salvation, the act of God condescending to the level of humanity to have a relationship with it, is clearly an act that God initiates. No amount of human works can accomplish that. It comes to humanity as a gift of grace from God. This gift purifies the human will so it would make a decision either to leave or remain in that relationship. While those who leave continue in their estrangement against God, those who remain corporate with God in the process of sanctification.

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