

Systematic Theology: Soteriology      Part 1      3/1/26

Introduction

- We now come to this most blessed and happy topic of study; soteriology. The doctrine of salvation.
- No greater issue exists than that of our future security and eternal destiny. No concern should be such a priority on our minds. No topic is so worthy of a thorough inquiry as that of salvation.
- “Soter,” a transliteration from the Greek word, σωτήρ (used 24 times in the NT), which means “rescuer” or “Savior.”
- Let us be reminded that there is nothing better than being saved. And there is nothing worse than being unsaved.
- All men are in one of those two states. And that is the way in which we must see each other.
- There are 2 and only 2 categories of people absolutely: saved and unsaved:

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to **those who are perishing**, but to **us who are being saved** it is the power of God.

- Said in other ways: Christian and non-Christian; regenerate and unregenerate; believer and unbeliever; going to heaven or going to hell; a child of God or a child of Satan; redeemed or lost; in the light or in the dark; on the narrow path or on the broad path; under God’s grace or under God’s wrath; justified or condemned; alive or dead; eternal life or eternal punishment. Which are you?
- There are only two categories; and they hinge upon our salvation.

Romans 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

- Charles Spurgeon celebrated this when he said of salvation and the saved:

“In God’s sight, you are as perfect as if you had never sinned; no, more than that, the Lord our Righteousness has put a divine garment on you, so that you have

more than the righteousness of man – you have the righteousness of God! Oh, you who are mourning by reason of inbred sin and depravity, remember, none of your sins can condemn you... Your standing is not in yourself: it is in Christ. Your acceptance is not in yourself, but in your Lord. You are as much accepted by God today, with all your sinfulness, as you will be when you stand before His throne, free from all corruption.”<sup>1</sup>

- Why would we study the doctrine of God, then the doctrine of man and sin before studying soteriology?
- When we speak of “saved,” several questions necessarily arise:
  - Saved from what?
  - Saved by whom?
  - Saved for what purpose?
  - Saved by what means?
  - How are we saved?
  - Etc.
  - And of course, there is the ultimate question from man’s vantage: “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30)
- The study of biblical soteriology answers these questions factually and biblically.

### **1. The Highest Goal of Salvation**

- a. This answers the question, “Saved for what purpose?”
- b. Two things are clear from a look at human history. Man is bent on self-destructive rebellion against God. God is bent on graciously saving rebellious man.
- c. God is a saving God. The story of history consists largely of God intervening to save humanity.
- d. Before we study what it means that God “saves,” we will look at the highest goal of salvation. Why does God save?
- e. We can answer the question in 2 ways.

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<sup>1</sup> *Morning and Evening*, April 4 Morning, p. 202.

- f. First, God saves because doing so is a manifestation of his character and nature. In the attributes of God, we studied the communicable attributes.
- g. God has the following attributes/perfections which fuel his act of saving sinful man. Each of these attributes are demonstrated in salvation:
  - i. Goodness (God is the perfect sum, source, and standard of all that is virtuous, wholesome, beautiful, and beneficial). God's goodness in salvation is demonstrated in the doing good to wrath-deserving sinners.
  - ii. Love (God sacrificially gives himself to others). God's love is seen in providing a wrath-bearing substitute, namely, Himself, in the place of hell-deserving sinners.
  - iii. Grace (God bestows favor on those who cannot, nor would not, earn it because they are alienated from God in will and nature, thus deserving divine wrath). God's grace is seen at every step of salvation, in doing the work to save and bestowing the benefits of salvation upon the elect.
  - iv. Mercy (God possesses and extends compassion for image-bearers by withholding their due divine punishment and transferring it to Christ). God's mercy is evident in salvation in withholding the sinner's punishment of eternity in hell and instead taking the penalty upon Himself.
  - v. Patience (God is longsuffering towards rebellious people). God's patience is seen in salvation as he bears with sinners, both those who will be redeemed and those who will not.
  - vi. Holiness (God is perfectly distinct from all creation and morally separate from sin in the entirety of his nature). God's holiness is evident in salvation by his refusal to compromise his standard of moral righteousness, through completely punishing the sin of the elect in the substitutionary death of Christ.
  - vii. Righteousness (God is absolutely just in all he does). God's righteousness is demonstrated in his act of salvation, namely in providing a righteous substitute to bear his judicial wrath earned by rebellious sinners such that he is just in forgiving the elect.

- h. Second, God saves sinners because it brings glory and honor to himself. God's own glory is the highest reason for salvation.
- “Because believers receive such immense blessings at the hand of God’s saving grace, it is a common misconception to assume that God’s chief regard in salvation is to sinners themselves. The privilege of being chosen by God for salvation on the basis of nothing in oneself; of being provided a substitute of such worthiness and honor as the Son of God himself; of receiving the gift of the new birth apart from any works of one’s own; of being united to Christ, declared righteous apart from works, adopted into the family of God, and conformed into his image, progressively on earth and perfectly in heaven – the flood of gracious benefits that man enjoys in salvation tempts the student of Scripture to believe that God’s saving love terminates ultimately on man. Scripture, however, reveals that salvation is not man centered but God centered.”<sup>2</sup>
    - i. Both the OT and NT testify that God’s highest reason for salvation is his own glory.
    - ii. OT:

Psalm 106:6–8 We have sinned like our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly. <sup>7</sup> Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; they did not remember Your abundant kindnesses, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. <sup>8</sup> Nevertheless **He saved them for the sake of His name**, that He might make His power known.
  - God certainly had compassion towards his people suffering in Egypt (Exod. 2:23-25). We know that from a look at his attributes.
  - And, he delights to extend grace to wrath-deserving sinners. However, his highest purpose in salvation is his own glory.

Exodus 9:15–16 “For *if by* now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. <sup>16</sup> But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, **in order to show**

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<sup>2</sup> Eds. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, p. 486.

you **My power and in order to proclaim My name** through all the earth.”

- Later, God foretells the salvation of elect Israelites for this reason:

Isaiah 42:1–8 “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. <sup>2</sup> “He will not cry out or raise *His voice*, nor make His voice heard in the street. <sup>3</sup> “A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. <sup>4</sup> “He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.” <sup>5</sup> Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, <sup>6</sup> “I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, <sup>7</sup> To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison. <sup>8</sup> “I am the LORD, that is My name; **I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.**”

- In other words, God is saying, “I am going to accomplish this most pre-eminent work of salvation. And I will do it so that not one morsel of glory and praise can go to anyone but Me, Yahweh.”
- Here, God declares the reason for why he will restrain his righteous wrath from Israel in salvation:

Isaiah 48:9–11 “**For the sake of My name** I delay My wrath, And **for My praise** I restrain *it* for you, In order not to cut you off. <sup>10</sup> “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. <sup>11</sup> “**For My own sake, for My own sake**, I will act; For how can *My name* be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

- As the Hebrews were about to go into exile for breaking the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh brings them this message of future salvation:

Ezekiel 36:19–23 “Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them. <sup>20</sup> When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.’ <sup>21</sup> But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. <sup>22</sup> Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, **but for My holy name**, which you have profaned

among the nations where you went. <sup>23</sup> **I will vindicate the holiness of My great name** which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.”

iii. The testimony from the NT:

Ephesians 1:3–14 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, <sup>4</sup> just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup> He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup> **to the praise of the glory of His grace**, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

- The Greek word translated “to” (vv. 6, 12, 14) communicates the intent of the subject. Thus, God’s intent on election by the Father, redemption by the Son, and sealing-regeneration by the Spirit is his own praise and glory.

<sup>7</sup> In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace <sup>8</sup> which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him <sup>10</sup> with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him <sup>11</sup> also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, <sup>12</sup> to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be **to the praise of His glory**.

<sup>13</sup> In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, **to the praise of His glory**.

1 John 2:12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you **for His name’s sake**.

- i. We are not surprised that God saves for his own honor and glory. God is perfectly for that which is the highest good. And that highest good is his own glory.
- j. Any action or impulse that deviates from God’s glory is idolatry. An

action, motivation, or thought that is not for the glory of God is for the glory of something lesser than God, which is the essence of sin.

- k. Therefore, God's act of saving wrath-deserving sinners is ultimately for God's own glory.
  - "God himself and the glory of his name are uppermost in God's affections. Any view of salvation that exalts man as God's chief regard necessarily denigrates the glory of God."<sup>3</sup>
  - Jonathan Edwards: "Because [God] infinitely values his own glory, consisting in the knowledge of himself, love to himself, and complacence [delight] and joy in himself; he therefore valued the image, communication, or participation of these in the creature. And it is because he values himself, that he delights in the knowledge, and love, and joy of the creature; as being himself the object of his knowledge, love, and complacence. For it is the necessary consequence of true esteem and love, that we value others' esteem of the same object, and dislike the contrary. For the same reasons, God approves of others' esteem and love of himself."<sup>4</sup>

## 2. God Intervenes into History for the Purpose of Salvation

- a. Salvation is one of the central topics of the Bible. God is a saving God.
- b. He intervenes into history for the purpose of saving. God enters our world in order to accomplish salvation.
- c. God created Adam and Eve, and it was all good. Once they sinned, all was not good.
- d. A quick history of God as a saving God:
- e. But a promise is given to save, cf. Gen. 3:15.
- f. God saves Noah. God then chooses Abraham. Why does he choose Abraham?

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<sup>3</sup> Biblical Doctrine, p. 488.

<sup>4</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, paragraph 276, from John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, p. 248.

It has nothing to do with Abraham and everything to do with his desire to save man from his natural predicament.

- g. God creates the nation Israel from Abraham, so that Israel would serve as his instrument of salvation. God is a saving God. Man is a self-destructive race.
- h. God preserves Israel, despite her centuries of rebellion and breaking covenant. He preserves her so that the prophecies of salvation to her and the world will remain, b/c he is a saving God.
- i. God enters history in the incarnation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity for what purpose? Salvation.

John 3:17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

- j. He saves and spreads the saving message out from Israel, way out. Consequently, he saves many, and continues to do so today.
- k. Revelation concludes foretelling the happy, eternal place for those whom God saves.
- l. Bruce Demarest: "From the Protoevangelium of Gen 3:15 to Rev 22:21, Scripture relates the grand story of how God has acted in grace to save his wayward image-bearers."<sup>5</sup>
- m. The Greek word, *sozo*, is used more than 100 times in the NT. The word generally connotes rescue or deliverance from danger, disease, enemies, or bondage. Thus the Greek word group commonly bears the theological meaning of deliverance from sin, death, and the Devil and the gift of eternal life.<sup>6</sup>
- n. In its sum, the word salvation in its theological sense denotes, negatively, deliverance from sin, death, and divine wrath and positively, the bestowal of far-ranging spiritual blessings both temporal and eternal. God freely conveys these benefits on the basis of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Mediator.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Demarest, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Demarest, p. 27.

- o. Both the Old and New Testaments are largely about God's gracious acts of saving self-destructive people through the Father, Son, and Spirit's work.

### 3. Humanity's Need for Salvation

- a. The essential backdrop for understanding salvation is man's natural condition; human depravity
- b. Man enters the world condemned in the line of Adam.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

- c. Important distinction: A human does not become a sinner upon sinning. The entire human race is by nature and ancestral line, sinful. Every person born is of the same spiritual stock: sinful, in Adam.
- d. Therefore, no one can be said to be more or less sinful than another in the sense of one's nature: we are all born in the same line.
- e. Man's present condition prior to salvation:
  - i. "every intent of the heart continually evil" (Gen. 6:5)
  - ii. deceitful and desperately sick hearts (Jer. 17:9-10)
  - iii. "perishing" (John 3:16)
  - iv. "lost" (Luke 15:11-32)
  - v. "condemned" (John 3:18)
  - vi. "dead in sin" (Eph. 2:1-2)
  - vii. Satanic/following Satan (Eph. 2:2)
  - viii. "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3)
  - ix. "having no hope" (Eph. 2:12)
  - x. "separate from Christ" (Eph. 3:12)
  - xi. "suppressing the truth" (Rom. 1:18)
  - xii. "futile in thinking" (Rom. 1:21)
  - xiii. "darkened heart" (Rom. 1:21)
  - xiv. "fools" (Rom. 1:22)
  - xv. worshiping creation over the Creator (Rom. 1:25)
  - xvi. "depraved mind" (Rom. 1:28)
  - xvii. "none righteous" (Rom. 3:10)
  - xviii. "none who seeks God" (Rom 3:11)

- xix. “useless” (Rom. 3:12)
- xx. “none who does good” (Rom. 3:12)
- xxi. “cursing and bitter of speech” (Rom. 3:14)
- xxii. “destruction and misery” (Rom. 3:16)
- xxiii. “no fear of God” (Rom. 3:18)
- xxiv. “helpless” (Rom. 5:6)
- xxv. “sinners” (Rom. 5:8)
- xxvi. “enemies of God” (Rom. 5:10)
- xxvii. “hostile in mind” (Col. 1:21)
- xxviii. “engaged in evil deeds” (Col. 1:21)
- xxix. condemned (Rom. 5:18)
- xxx. “slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:17)
- xxxi. “slaves of the fear of death” (Heb. 2:15)

f. Man’s future condition apart from salvation:

- i. “disgrace and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2)
- ii. “cast into outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12)
- iii. “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12)
- iv. “bind them in bundles and burn them” (Matt. 13:30)
- v. “eternal fire” (Matt. 18:8, 25:41)
- vi. “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43)
- vii. “hell” (Mark 9:45)
- viii. “where the worm does not die, & the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48)
- ix. unable to escape hell (Luke 16:26)
- x. “everlasting destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9)
- xi. “away from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9)
- xii. “thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14-15)

g. Therefore, in light of our present condition w/o salvation and future condition apart from salvation, we conclude that our predicament is beyond severe.

h. Man exists naturally in sin and is headed to judgment. God need not do anything for man to proceed to judgment. God, however, must do something for man to proceed out of judgment to salvation. That’s what he does. He is a saving God.

i. If God did nothing—if he did not intervene in human history—we would justly proceed into eternal punishment.

- j. Thomas Watson: “Thus it is in hell; they would die, but they cannot. The wicked shall be always dying but never dead; the smoke of the furnace ascends forever and ever. Oh! Who can endure thus to be ever upon the rack? This word ‘ever’ breaks the heart. Wicked men now think the Sabbaths long, and think a prayer long; but oh! How long will it be to lie in hell forever and ever?”
- k. But God has done something. He saves, through Christ. B/c he has done so, and does so, there will be, perhaps, millions upon millions saved.

#### **4. Various Theories of Salvation**

- a. Roman Catholic salvation
  - i. Progressive salvation attained by faith and works. Baptism is said to remit original sin and impart sanctifying grace. The baptized, however, are not justified/declared righteous.
  - ii. There is not the idea of instantly declared permanently righteous in Romanism. The Council of Trent, 6th session, Canon 30 declared justification by faith alone in Christ alone, anathema.
  - iii. Rather, justification is a progressive process by works and the sacraments. Assurance of salvation is not possible unless one becomes a saint and the committing of a mortal sin would separate from Christ.
  - iv. Purgatory is reserved for post-death purging of remaining unrighteousness.
  - v. A rough description of the order of salvation for Rome: (1) sacrament of baptism, (2) sacrament of confirmation, (3) sacrament of the Eucharist, (4) sacrament of penance – remits post-baptismal, mortal sins (also requires “works of satisfaction” (almsgiving, fasting, masses, etc)), (5) the sacrament of extreme unction or last anointing – consolation of the dying person in the face of their unconfessed sins, (6) purgatory
- b. Theological liberalism salvation
  - i. Denies miracles, biblical authority and inerrancy, and other orthodox doctrine such as the fall, total depravity, and the sovereignty of God.
  - ii. Anthropocentric ideas, centering on what brings current approval,

actualization, and esteem to man.

- iii. Less focus on sin, depravity, atonement, heaven, and hell.
  - iv. Salvation involves a general moral progression; as long as one is not committing grave sins in the eyes of current culture; through advocating and doing a measure of social justice, people groups are saved and good with God or deity.
  - v. Through generally affirming (distorting) the teachings of Christ purely on a human-moral level, man is good with God.
- c. Liberation theology salvation
- i. Not focused personal or inward spirituality, but outward, external concerns only.
  - ii. Most people are in Christ, or going to heaven, but many/most have become dehumanized by social, economic, and political oppression.
  - iii. Salvation is a group idea, focused on the overthrow of unjust and corrupt society.
  - iv. Often the Exodus is considered externally, as the mode of salvation; God overthrows an oppressive, evil society and brings people into social and economic freedom.
- d. Barthian neoorthodoxy salvation
- i. Christ accomplished salvation generally for all through his death on the cross. There is no real need for individuals to personally confess sin, surrender to Christ, and repent.
  - ii. Rather, through his death, Christ accomplished salvation for all. However, some still need to awaken from their moral-spiritual slumber and live better in this life.
- e. Arminian salvation
- i. Christ died to pay the penalty of our sin. Prevenient, or preparing, grace flows from the cross to transform sinners in the first moment of moral light.

- ii. Prevenient grace begins to dampen the crippling effects of sin. Moral free agency and some moral light are present in individuals.
- iii. The unsaved then can respond to the gospel as they cooperate with God and trust in Christ as Savior.
- iv. The calling of God is resistible, which means sinners may choose to reject Christ.
- v. Election means that God chooses to save those whom he foresaw would respond to grace and trust in Christ.
- vi. The new birth/regeneration occurs as a result of the individual being willing to work with the divine work. In that sense, Arminian salvation is *synergistic*, not monergistic.
- vii. By deliberate sin, Christians can renounce their prior faith and fall from a state of salvation/grace so as to forfeit eternal salvation.