

## **The Doctrine of Salvation**

### **Introduction**

Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) is the central message of Scripture. The story of redemption unfolds from Genesis 3 through Revelation 22. As soon as man fell, God promised deliverance (Genesis 3:15). While the Old Testament anticipates Christ's coming; the New Testament records the event and explains the meaning. Man's problem since Adam's fall has always been a lack of knowledge of God and a sense of guilt before Him. The answer to both problems is found only in the redemptive revelation of God's love in Christ. Salvation planned, executed and applied by the triune God is comprehended in His nature. Soteriology includes many theological terms (reconciliation, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification) but not one of these terms fully explains the meaning or the importance of salvation. This study will systematically provide a basis for the reader's own scriptural and relevant understanding. C. S. Lewis well states, "The glory of God, and, as our only means of glorifying Him, the salvation of human souls, is the real business of life."

### **Salvation From What and Why?**

Throughout history, Christ's Church has consistently proclaimed and held to the same doctrine of soteriology. Whenever the good news of salvation is proclaimed, sinful man asks, "Salvation from what, and why?" The Bible answers, from sin so that we may live in fellowship with God both here and in the hereafter. What is sin? One of the best answers to this question comes from the Westminster Catechism "sin is any want (lack) of conformity to the law of God or transgression of it" (1 John 3:4). This Biblical answer stops short at a crucial point. Sin, is not

only a failure to obey the law of God and/or a violation of it; it is also - and perhaps even more significantly – a dethronement of God. Sin is the disruption of the creature’s personal relationship with his Creator.

### **Sins Origin**

The origin of depravity is found in the Garden of Eden. Adam’s sin has been imputed to all through the principle of representation also referred to as “federal headship” (Rom. 5:12). Mankind sinned representatively in Adam and therefore everyone after him inherits a sinful nature from which follows every sinful act. The root of man’s perversity is an inherited sinful nature because of his fall in Adam. Man’s predicament is the result of his wickedness – inherited and actual. On this principle the Apostle Paul built one of the most powerful arguments for Christ Jesus standing as a savior for all in the book of Romans. Observe the contrast and similarities between Adam’s sin and Christ’s redemption. *Rom 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: . . . But not as the offence, so also [is] the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, [which is] by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as [it was] by one that sinned, [so is] the gift: for the judgment [was] by one to condemnation, but the free gift [is] of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one [judgment came] upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [the free gift came] upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover*

*the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:15-21).*

The result of sin is estrangement from God, one's fellowman, and even from oneself. Man is by nature totally depraved. This does not mean that every man is as bad as he can possibly be. Sin has pervaded every aspect of his nature and he is totally incapable of achieving his own salvation. His intellect has become so darkened by sin that he cannot understand the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Salvation is not a theory or speculation about God. It is more than deductions from objective facts concerning His nature and attributes. True religion is man's relation to the divine Being. It involves fellowship and obedience on man's part and self revelation of God's part by the removal of sin. None of which can be possible without the Christian experience.

### **The Salvation Experience**

The Christian experience doesn't only refer to an experience of salvation but also includes the entire experience that comes through fellowship with God in Christ. Regeneration and its results are all included. In religion, a personal interest and relationship to God gives vitality and power that goes far beyond speculation or theory about God. It is the experience of God. Knowing God and fellowshiping with Him overrides inherited depravity and the propensity to sin. The Scriptures teach a self revelation of God in the domain of human history. This revelation is made real and vital for men in the realm of personal experience.

## **The Scope Of Salvation**

Salvation is provided through Christ and applied through the Holy Spirit. The provision of salvation covers such topics as the plan of God and the person and work of Jesus Christ. The application of salvation previews the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion, justification, regeneration, adoption and other doctrines which relate to the Christian walk, such as sanctification, preservation and the means of grace.

Scripture reveals that God has a definite plan including means, objectives, conditions, and candidates. God has only one plan. Everyone must be saved the same way, whether immoral or moral, trained or untrained, Jew or Gentile, whether living in the Old Testament period or in the present age.

God has provided salvation in the person and work of His son. The Son was made flesh, died in our place, rose again from the dead, ascended to the Father, received the place of power at God's right hand, and appears before God in the believer's behalf. He will come again to consummate redemption. Christ's work saves from the guilt, penalty, power and the presence of sin.

Repentance and faith are the only necessary conditions of salvation but repentance is merely a preparation of the heart not the price paid for the gift of life. The Holy Spirit is the agent in the application of salvation to the individual soul. He uses the Word of God to bring about conviction, point the way to Christ and regenerate the soul. He continues the work of sanctification in the believer's life. Salvation is not complete until the believer is resurrected and presented holy and blameless to Christ by the Holy Spirit. In the ultimate and fullest sense no man is saved until he has been glorified (1 Cor. 5:5).

Although there has only been one plan of salvation; Galatians 4:4 states *But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law*

(Gal. 4:4). This time of preparation disclosed to man the true nature of sin and the depth of depravity, revealed sinful man's powerlessness to preserve or regain an adequate knowledge of God, and the impossibility to deliver himself from sin by any other means than substitutionary atonement. History shows how imperfectly the world learned these lessons; yet a partial learning of them was necessary before God would introduce the Savior in person.

God's method of redemption was through the seed of the woman (Gen.3:15). The redeemer was born of a woman and under the law (Gal.4:4). Christ needed to be both human and divine to be the mediator between man and God and to reconcile man to God. Reconciliation could only be accomplished through the incarnation, God being made flesh. In the eternal past, Christ "was with God," indeed he "was God" (John 1:1). This was "before the world was" (John 17:5). He is called "the Word" (John 1:1, 14; Rev. 19:13). A word is a medium of manifestation, a means of communication, and a method of revelation. In harmony with this interpretation, Hebrews 1:2 states *In these last days He has spoken to us by His Son*. God became a man in order to confirm the promises made to the Old Testament patriarchs and to show mercy to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:8-12). Many of the Old Testament promises reveal new dimensions of the person and provision of salvation. God at various times promised to send his Son into the world - the way of salvation (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:2). In the Old Testament God is revealed as creator and governor. The Old Testament reveals the unity, holiness, strength, and goodness of God. Christ completed the revelation by adding the idea of God as Father (Matt. 6:9). John wrote, *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (John 1:18)*. The relationship of the child of God to his heavenly Father is a precious New Testament concept. With a much greater revelation came a new dispensation under a new covenant relationship. Jesus came to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb.

9:26). Jesus said, *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)*. It is clearly indicated that he needed to become a man in order to die for the sins of mankind (Hebrews 2:9-10). 1John 3:5 states, *And ye know that he was manifested (appeared in order) to take away our sins; and in him is no sin*. Shortly after John stated that Christ appeared to take away sin he wrote that Christ also appeared to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8, Hebrews 2:14-15). Christ's coming, particularly his work on the cross, defeated Satan (John 12:32; 14:30). Satan is a vanquished foe. He has lost his hold on his subjects; someday he will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

Other religions base their claim to recognition on the teaching of their founders; Christianity is distinguished from all of them by the importance it assigns to the death of its founder. Take away the death of Christ as interpreted by the Scriptures, and you reduce Christianity to the level of the ethnic religions. Though we would still have a higher system of ethics, were we to take away the cross of Christ, we would have no more salvation than these other religions. Unlike the sermons preached from pulpits across America today, the subject of the apostolic preaching was Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 1:18; 23; 2:2; Gal. 6:14). Rather than "five points of prosperity", the New Testament Church preached the gospel. The term "gospel" means "good news" and it is used in various ways. The four accounts of the earthly life of Jesus are called Gospels but more narrowly the word "gospel" refers to the "good news" of salvation. Paul said the gospel consists of the death of Christ for our sins, his burial, and his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-5). The death of Christ for man's sin is good news. Man does not have to die in his sin. The Mosaic law, the Sermon on the Mount, and Christ's teaching and example, reveal sin and the need of a savior. However, the remedy for sin can only be found in Christ's death and resurrection.

Christ's sufferings were not the sympathetic sufferings of a friend, but the substitutionary sufferings of the Lamb of God for the sin of the world (Romans 5:8, 1 Cor. 15:3, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18, John 10:11). Isaiah wrote, *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. (V. 5) But he [was] wounded for our transgressions, [he was] bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:4)* God's fundamental attribute, holiness, requires removing the outrage of sin made possible only through Christ's death. Man has sinned against God and has incurred his displeasure and condemnation. God rightly requires the penalty of a broken law. God must punish sin. He cannot free the sinner until the demands of justice are satisfied. God will not, apart from substitution, clear the guilty. Only through Christ's death could God be just while justifying the sinner (Rom. 3:25).

### **The Fundamentals Of Salvation**

The great work of redemption and the extraordinary plan recovering man from the fall showcase two aspects of God's personality. First, who Jesus is and what He is to us. Second, the experience of God's redeeming power in the soul. A personal experience of God's redeeming grace through Christ is necessary to fully understand Christian religion. Experiences would go off course without the ever-present corrective influence of the Scriptures. Without God's redeeming grace in us, scripture would never become a vital and transforming reality.

What is the logical order in the experience of salvation? There is, of course, no chronological sequence; conversion, justification, regeneration, union with Christ and adoption all take place at the same time. Sanctification is both an act and a process. But there is a logical sequence. First, the Scriptures invite man to turn to God (Prov. 1:23; Isa. 31:6; 59:20; Ezek 14:6;

18:32; 33:9-11; Matt. 18:3; Acts 3:19; Heb. 6:11). Conversion is that turning to God, and it represents the human response to the provision of God. It consists of two elements: repentance and faith. Man cannot justify, regenerate, or adopt himself. However, by God's enablement, man can turn to God. Repentance and faith lead to justification, and justification leads to life (Romans 5:17)

### **Repentance**

The importance of repentance is not recognized as it should be. Some call upon the unsaved to accept Christ and to believe without ever showing the sinner that he is lost and needs a Savior. Scripture repeatedly stresses the preaching of repentance. Repentance was the message of the Old Testament prophets (Deut. 30:10; 2 Kings 17:13; Jer. 8:6; Ezek. 14:6; 18:30). It was the center of John the Baptist's (Matt 3:2 Mark 1:4) Christ's (Mat. 4:17, Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3-5), the twelve apostles' (Mark 6:12), Peter's (Acts 2:38; 3:19) and Paul's preaching (Acts 20:21, 26:20). All men everywhere are commanded to repent (Acts 17:30). Repentance is something in which all heaven is supremely interested (Luke 15:7, 10). Repentance is the most important fundamental because it is an absolute condition for salvation (Matthew 21:32, Hebrews 6:1, Luke 13:2-5). In the broadest sense, repentance is essentially a change of mind. However, in coming to God, repentance deals with a change in the soul. Three main areas are primarily involved, the intellect, emotion, and will. Intellectually views of sin, God, and self must change. Sin comes to be recognized as personal guilt, God as the one who justly demands righteousness, and self as defiled and helpless. The scriptures often speak of this aspect of repentance as the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20; Job 42:4; Ps. 51:3; Luke 15:17; Rom. 1:32). Repentance also involves a change of mind concerning Christ. For example, Peter preached Christ as the

promised Messiah and Savior to Jews who understood Christ as a mere man (Acts 2:14-40). The emotional element implies a change of feeling. Sorrow for sin and a desire for pardon are important aspects of repentance. Weeping, mourning, sackcloth, and ashes are involved in true repentance.(Matthew 11:21, Isaiah 22:12, James 4:9-10). Jesus referenced Jonah 3 using Nineveh as an example of what repentance looks like (Matthew 12:41). The volitional element implies a change of will, disposition and purpose (2 Col 7:10). Jesus said “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me (Mat.10:39, Mat. 16:25; Luke. 9:24, Luke. 17:33; John. 12:25). Jesus’ words in these verses strike a death blow to the cheap, easy, counterfeit Christianity so commonly preached today. True salvation is a radical commitment to leave the old life behind to follow Jesus into a new and very different life. “Easy believing” that leaves a sinner unchanged is not true salvation. When a sinner is saved his/her life, desires, habits, interest, and commitments radically change. Jesus said “DENY HIMSELF”. This phrase literally means, “to completely disown, to utterly separate oneself from someone.” Denying self is not the same thing as self-denial. Some people will practice self-denial by withholding certain things. That is not what Jesus is talking about.

Denying self is far more intense. The Greek word “aparneomai” means a total disconnection with one’s own interests. Denying self implies that a person stops listening to their own voice, leaning on their own power, and trying to fulfill their own wants. Denying self requires a “Not mine but Thine” attitude. When denying self, a person gives up all personal rights and relinquishes all control of their life to the Lord Christ Jesus. The change in volition is a crucial part of the new birth. Most religions and popular ministries are focused on catering to self. Trying to make people feel good about themselves, they aim at building up self esteem and praising individual accomplishments. An intellectual or emotional change that fails to crush a

person's will and causes a person to surrender absolute control to Christ falls short of Biblical repentance.

## **Faith**

Like repentance, faith is a doctrine that doesn't receive the attention it deserves. A man's life is governed by what he believes and what he puts his faith in. His religion is controlled by the person he believes in. Scriptures declare that by faith we are saved (Acts 16:31; Rom. 5:1; 9:30-32; Eph. 2:8), enriched with the Spirit (Gal. 3:5; 14), sanctified (Acts 15:9; 26:18), kept (Rom 11:20; 2 Cor. 1:24; 1 Pet. 1:5; 1 John 5:4), established (Isa. 7:9), and healed (Acts 14:9; James 5:15). Believers walk by faith (2Cor. 5:7) and endure difficulties by faith (Mark 9:23; Rom. 4:18-21; Heb. 11:32-40).

The terms "belief", "hope", "the faith", and "faith" are often misused. The word "belief" is often used in the same sense as the word "faith"; but often refers only to the intellect. The Scriptures emphasize the intellectual aspect of faith in such references as (Ps. 9:10; John 2:23; and Rom. 10:14). Nicodemus had faith in this sense of the term when he came to Jesus (John 3:2). The demons believe the facts concerning God (James 2:19). Simon Magnus "believed" but there are no indications that repented (Acts 8:13). Faith must be more than intellectual assent.

"Hope" refers exclusively to the future, while "faith" refers to the past, present, and future. "Hope" has been defined as desire plus expectation, but scriptural hope includes the elements of knowledge and assurance resting upon the truth revealed in scripture. "The faith" refers to the sum total of Christian doctrines contained in scripture (Luke 18:8; Acts 6:7; 1 Tim. 4:1; 6:10; Jude 3). Trust is an Old Testament word for the New Testament words "believe" or "faith."

Faith isn't a simple word to define. In conversion, faith is the turning of the soul to God, while repentance is the turning of the soul from sin. Scriptures represent faith an act of the heart involving an intellectual, emotional, and volitional change. Men believe with the heart to be saved (Rom 10:9). Faith must be more than intellectual assent.

There are three main aspects necessary in saving faith. Each preceding term logically leads to the succeeding. Faith begins with intellectual belief in the revelation of God in nature, in the historical facts of Scripture, and in the doctrines taught therein. Paul says in Romans 10:17 *So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Sinners must know the gospel intellectually before they can believe in Christ. The Psalmist wrote, *And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee* (Psalms 9:10).

The emotional element of faith results from the personal need and application of the redemption provided in Christ (Psalms 106:12, Matthew 13:20-21, John 5:35). But it must not stop here, for while the emotional element is certainly to be recognized as a component of faith, it must not be treated as if it were the sole characteristic of faith. Surrender is the logical outgrowth of the intellectual and the emotional aspects of faith. A man is not saved unless his faith has all three of these elements in it. The voluntary surrender is so comprehensive that it presupposes the other two. No one can be saved who does not surrender and wholeheartedly embrace Christ (Proverbs 23:26, Matthew 11:28-30, Luke 14:26-27). That Greek term *pisteuo* (to believe or trust) is used in the sense of surrender and commitment. Scriptures frequently emphasize that a man should count the cost before committing himself to the Lord (Matt. 8:19-22; Luke 14:26-33). To be saved, a sinner must believe in the Lord Jesus and confess Him as Lord (Acts 16:31, Romans 10:9)

## **Conversion**

Three elements constitute conversion. A sinner must have a penitent confession of sin, look to Jesus for forgiveness, and experience a real change of heart. Without these essential points one does not have a Biblical conversion (Matthew 18:3, Acts 3:19, Psalms 51:13, Matthew 13:15, 2 Corinthians 5:17). The Bible clearly contrasts the converted (those who have experienced the new birth) from the unconverted. Lost sheep are separated from the sheep that have been found, guests refusing the invitation are isolated from the guest feasting at the table, wise virgins are distinguished from the foolish, a herd of goats is divided from a herd of sheep. There are those who are dead in trespasses and sin in their natural state of spiritual death and those who have been quickened or made alive to God. A person is either in darkness or in light. He is either a child of God or a child of wrath. Believers are not condemned, but nonbelievers are condemned already because they have not believed. In the flesh a sinner cannot please God, but a saint is chosen, called, justified, and accepted in the beloved. Jesus made faith and regeneration inseparable by declaring that a person must be born again to have everlasting life (John 3:3). Faith and the new birth always go together implying a supernatural change (John 5:4, 1 John 5:1). The change is often described as a quickening and a rising from the dead together with Christ (Ephesians 1:19, 2:1). The change makes a person a new creation (Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 2:10, 4:24). What a wonderful change that must be which is first described as a birth, then as a resurrection from the dead, resulting in a new creation (Colossians 1:13, I John 3:14, John 5:24). Conversion and regeneration are often described as being “begotten again” (1 Peter 1:13, James 1:18). Conversion is a change in character and feeling. Before salvation, a sinner is an enemy of God but when conversion takes place he begins to love God (Colossians 1:21). This

change from enmity to friendship with God is marked by a change in a man's judicial state before God. Before conversion a sinner is condemned, but when he receives spiritual life "there is no longer any condemnation" (Romans 8:1). This process changes a sinner's condition and always results in an inward peace and happiness he has never experienced (Romans 5:1-11). Conversion enables a sinner to experience rest, and quenches his thirst never to thirst again (Matthew 11:28, Hebrews 4:3, John 4:13). Conversion makes a sinner's heart and mind different than they were before (2 Cor. 5:17). Conversion is the grand blessing of the covenant of grace. Hebrews 10:16 states that the blessing of the gospel enabling rest spoken of in Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 36:26-27 are fulfilled in believers. Through the great work of the Holy Spirit believers know the Father and the Son. Let those who are unconverted never rest until they have believed in Christ, have a new heart created in them, and a right spirit bestowed upon them. A change must come over you which you cannot work in yourself, but which must be wrought by divine power. Salvation is of the LORD!