

## SOTERIOLOGY – THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Of all the doctrines in the Bible, none needs to be so thoroughly studied and comprehended as the doctrine of salvation. This doctrine is very deep for its entire system originated in the infinite wisdom of God. Understanding the biblical doctrine of salvation not only has temporal ramifications, but also eternal. To be ignorant of or to reject or to misunderstand the true biblical doctrine of salvation is eternally fatal. Therefore, this is one doctrine that must be accurately and precisely studied and grasped.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer said, "...Soteriology is the cornerstone of Systematic Theology, being, as it is to the fullest degree, that which men may comprehend of God's self-revelation to a fallen race" (Vol. 3, p. 11).

Dr. Charles Ryrie said, "Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, must be the grandest theme in the Scriptures. It embraces all of time as well as eternity past and future. It relates in one way or another to all of mankind, without exception. It is personal, national and cosmic. And it centers on the greatest Person, our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Basic Theology*, p. 277).

Dr. J. Oliver Buswell said, "In undertaking the presentation of the vast subject of God's plan of salvation freely offered to the world through Christ, (doctrines). These are 'the deepest things we know.' These are the highest and holiest, and the most essential matters for our eternal salvation" (*A Systematic Theology of Christian Religion*, Part III, p. 5).

In the study of Soteriology, the primary Person about whom the doctrine is aimed is Jesus Christ. However, there is a difference between Soteriology and Christology. Even though at times the two doctrines overlap, the primary distinction is that Soteriology specifically focuses on Christ's work, whereas Christology focuses more on Christ's Person as it relates to His work.

When one attempts to study the doctrine of salvation in a complete and thorough way, one will be left with the same mindset of the Apostle Paul, who, when considering the implications of this great theme said, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33).

**QUESTION #1** – Why study Soteriology—the doctrine of salvation?

The answers to this question are given specifically to the believer. The ability to understand any doctrine is contingent upon the indwelling Holy Spirit. Therefore, the unbeliever does not accept the things of the Spirit of God and he cannot understand them (I Cor. 2:14). The essence of this first question is this—"Why should a believer, who is already saved, study the doctrine of salvation?"

**Reason #1** - Because of our ignorance .

Floyd Barackman made an interesting observation in his theology when he stated that because of every believer's familiarity with the Gospel which saved every believer, he naturally assumes he understands the doctrine of soteriology and tends to treat the doctrine lightly (*Practical Christian Theology*, p. 243).

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However, when we consider some of the key terms connected with this doctrine and consider how little we really know of these important terms, it becomes very evident that our knowledge is lacking—redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, conviction, repentance, faith, regeneration, forgiveness, justification, imputation, sanctification, preservation, substitution and glorification.

Paul said, “If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know” (I Cor. 8:2). This must certainly be admitted in this doctrine and should motivate each of us to continually learn and grow.

### **Reason #2** - Because of our warfare .

It is very important to realize that a clear and precise understanding of the doctrine of salvation is a critical piece of armor necessary for defeating Satan. Paul said, “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Clearly, the doctrine of salvation is a key to being victorious in satanic warfare. If ever there is a doctrine in which we need precision, it is this one. Satan is out to attack this doctrine as no other. Those who are precise in their doctrinal understanding of salvation are armed with weaponry that can defeat him. The fact that it is metaphorically pictured as “the helmet of salvation” indicates that it is imperative that our minds truly grasp this doctrine.

### **Reason #3** - Because of our responsibility .

We have a charge from God to proclaim the Gospel (Mark 16:15; II Tim. 4:5). It is our responsibility to give a defense of what we believe (I Peter 3:15). Obviously, if we have never studied the doctrine, our ability to share and defend will be very surface level. According to the Scriptures, God would desire that every believer be at a meat level of understanding and teaching as opposed to a milk level of understanding and teaching (Heb. 5:11-14). The more we understand the doctrine of salvation, the more we are able to accurately proclaim it. Since we are specifically given the ministry and message of reconciliation as ambassadors for Christ (II Cor. 5:18-20), it is imperative that we have a solid grasp of the doctrine of the Gospel. Most people in this world are lost and the Gospel is very specific and narrow (Matt. 7:13-14). In order for lost people to respond to the Gospel, they must fully understand and unlock the doctrine of salvation.

### **Reason #4** - Because of doctrinal future .

As we near the end of the Church Age, Satan will specifically attack soteriology (I Tim. 4:1, 16). Satan and his demonic forces are out to deceive people and take them away from a precise understanding of God’s doctrines and Word. They will particularly attack soteriology, for they realize if they can keep people from a thorough knowledge of this doctrine, they can keep them from giving an adequate defense of it.

## SOTERIOLOGY (3)

**Reason #5** - Because of personal judgment .

There are two specifically stated New Testament reasons for actually considering one to be accursed:

- 1) One who does not love the Lord is accursed (I Cor. 16:22).
- 2) One who tampers with the Gospel is to be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

It is a very serious matter in the sight of God to present any distortion concerning the Gospel and biblical salvation. Dr. Charles Ryrie said of this: “Not comprehending clearly the doctrine of salvation can lead to proclaiming a false or perverted Gospel, and many statements of the Gospel one hears today may well come under this curse” (Ryrie, p. 278).

We not only have the responsibility of accurately understanding and proclaiming the truth of the Gospel, but we also have the responsibility of spotting, warning and marking those who are not accurately understanding and proclaiming the truth of the Gospel. This adds real weight and becomes a real impetus for a careful analysis of the doctrine of salvation.

**QUESTION #2** – What does the word “soteriology” mean?

The word “soteria” is the Greek word for salvation . It comes from the word “soter” which means savior .

The actual word communicates several key concepts crucial to the doctrine:

In the O.T., the word, as Chafer says, “presents a latitude of meaning ranging from deliverance from enemies to right relations with God” (Vol. 3, p. 3).

In both the O.T. and N.T., the word communicates several concepts: deliverance , preservation , safety , restoration , and healing . Each one of these concepts is important to the doctrine of salvation, but as Dr. Ryrie says, “...word usage does not begin to fathom all that the biblical revelation declares about salvation” (*Basic Theology*, p. 280).

As with all other doctrines, words are crucial to understanding thoughts and concepts, but equally important are theological and doctrinal concepts which are formed from a study of the words and contexts. In other words, a word study of the key words pertaining to salvation is not enough to bring one into a full understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Words must form together to communicate sound doctrine which must be understood.

There are some fundamental and basic differences between salvation in the O.T. and salvation in the N.T. It may also be observed that once these fundamental differences are seen and known, there are fundamental similarities between salvation in the O.T. and salvation in the N.T.

## SOTERIOLOGY (4)

Generally speaking, we may make the following observations:

1) Salvation in the O.T. was thought of in terms of a national and political deliverance from physical enemies (Deut. 30:5-6; Ezek. 36:24-28).

Salvation in the N.T. is thought of in terms of an individual and personal deliverance from spiritual enemies (Col. 1:13).

2) Salvation in the O.T. focuses on Jesus Christ as Messiah.

Salvation in the N.T. focuses on Jesus Christ as Savior.

3) Salvation in both the O.T. and N.T. looked forward to a future time of intimate, eternal, harmonious and pure fellowship with God.

4) Salvation in the O.T. focused on a future kingdom.

Salvation in the N.T. focuses on a future glory.

5) Salvation in both the O.T. and N.T. has to do with deliverance from sin.

This important point was misunderstood by most in the O.T. for even during the time of Christ, Israel assumed salvation meant political deliverance, not spiritual deliverance. This is precisely why Christ kept trying to point out that first there must be spiritual salvation before there can be physical salvation.

The N.T. is very emphatic to point out that salvation has to do with deliverance from sin.

**QUESTION #3** – What are the two fundamental ideas that are critical to the meaning of salvation?

**Idea #1** - Being saved means to be delivered and rescued from a lost status.

**Idea #2** - Being saved means to be delivered and brought into a saved status.

When the true Gospel is proclaimed, it may follow one of these ideas or both. In the true Gospel, there is the negative and the positive. There can be a presentation that is pure warning and there can be a presentation that is pure grace. Both of these ideas lend themselves to these possibilities (Jude 22-23).

Dr. Chafer observed: “Gospel preaching may follow either of these conceptions. It may warn the wicked to flee from the wrath to come, or it may woo them by the contemplation of those benefits which God’s infinite grace provides” (Vol. 3, p. 5).

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In other words, in Gospel presentation it is legitimate to emphasize all that is meant in the lost status or to emphasize all that is meant in the saved status.

There must be two sides to salvation since it takes one, as Ryrie says, "...from condemnation to justification, from death to eternal life, from alienation to filiation" (*Basic Theology*, p. 277).

Without doubt, the doctrine of salvation is one of the grandest themes in all of the Word of God. The possibility of being saved and the reality of actually being saved is the most exalted status that any person can have.

**QUESTION #4** – What does man need to be saved from?

Man needs to be saved or delivered from at least four things:

1) Man needs to be saved from his sin.

Simply stated, man needs salvation because man is a sinner. All people are in the same condition in that all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. Every person is "sold into bondage to sin" (Rom. 7:14).

**A.** Every person is a sinner according to God's Word.

- 1) I Kings 8:46; 2) Psalm 143:2; 3) Prov. 20:9; 4) Eccl. 7:20; 5) Rom. 3:10, 12; 6) Rom. 3:19-20; 7) Rom. 3:23; 8) Gal. 3:22; 9) James 3:2; 10) I John 1:8.

**B.** Every person is a sinner according to personal practice.

- 1) Isaiah 53:6; 2) Psalm 14:2-3; 3) Eph. 2:3.

**C.** Every person is a sinner according to an inherited nature. Psalm 51:5

**D.** Every person is a sinner according to divine imputation. Rom. 5:12-21

Man has a terrible sin problem and he needs to be saved from his sin.

2) Man needs to be saved from God's wrath.

One who is not saved is already under the umbrella of the wrath of God and if the status does not change, one will eventually receive the full consequences of His wrath (Rom. 1:18; John 3:36).

3) Man needs to be saved from God's Law.

God's Law declares every human being guilty. No human being has ever measured up to the Law of God. God's Law will shut every mouth; it makes every person accountable and cannot ever make one right with God (Rom. 3:19-20). God's Law will be used to bring about God's wrath (Rom. 4:15).