

Lesson 16

Part Six – Soteriology: The Doctrine of Salvation

- I. False Theories on the Atonement
 - a. Ransom to Satan Theory
 - b. Recapitulation Theory
 - c. Commercial Theory
 - d. Moral Influence Theory
 - e. Accident Theory
 - f. Example (Martyr) Theory
 - g. Governmental Theory
- II. Correct Understanding of the Atonement
 - a. Substitution
 - b. Redemption
 - c. Reconciliation
 - d. Propitiation
 - e. Forgiveness
 - f. Justification
- III. The Extent of the Atonement
 - a. Limited Atonement
 - b. Unlimited Atonement
- IV. The Process of Salvation

Having just spoken of the various understandings of the atonement as well as the extent of the atonement, we now turn our attention to the application of Christ's atoning work or the Process of Salvation. When we speak of this process, we refer to it from two perspectives: God's Perspective and Man's perspective. First, let's look at salvation from God's perspective...

- a. From God's Perspective

It's important to realize that salvation is a Trinitarian endeavor. In other words, we can say that our salvation was planned and purposed by the God the Father, accomplished by God the Son, and applied by God the Holy Spirit. Let's look a little closer at each of these components.

- i. Work of the Father

God the Father's plan for salvation includes as one of its most critical components the doctrine of **sovereign election**. Election may be defined theologically as "that eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and eternal salvation." One of the principal passages concerning election is Ephesians 1:4 in the statement "He chose us."

The verb “chose” is the Greek “eklego,” which means “to call out” from among the people. The word means that God selected some individuals from out of the masses to be saved. It’s also important to understand that the word always appears in the middle voice. What does this mean? It means that God chose “for Himself,” describing the purpose of His having so chosen. We can note several critical characteristics of election: (1) it took place in eternity past (Eph. 1:4); (2) it is an act of a sovereign God and is in accordance with His sovereign will (Rom. 9:11; 2 Tim. 1:9); (3) it is an expression of the love of God (Eph. 1:4); (4) it is not conditioned on man in any way (2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 9:11); (5) it reflects the justice of God (i.e. there can be no charge of injustice with God on the basis of His sovereign election of some) (Rom. 9:14, 20).

The second work of salvation performed by God the Father is that of **predestination**. The word “predestination” comes from the Greek “proorizo,” which means “to mark out beforehand.” This word appears six times in the New Testament (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11). The English word “horizon” is derived from “proorizo.” God, by His sovereign choice marked believers off in eternity past. It’s important to note that predestination does not refer exclusively to salvation but encapsulates all events (Acts 4:28); it determined our status as adopted sons of God (Eph. 1:5); it assures our ultimate glorification (Rom. 8:29-30); it is for the purpose of extolling the grace of God (Eph. 1:6); it secures our eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:11); and it’s according to the free choice of God and according to His will (Eph. 1:5, 11).

The third work of salvation performed by God the Father is **adoption**. The Greek word translated as “adoption” means “placing as a son” and describes the rights and privileges as well as the new position of the believer in Christ. The word is taken from Roman custom where, in a legal ceremony, the adopted son was given all the rights of a natural-born son. In this rite, four things happened: (1) The adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family, (2) He became heir to his new father’s estate. (3) The old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out as if they had never been. (4) In the eyes of the law the adopted person was literally and absolutely the son of his new father. Paul employs this Roman understanding to describe the Christian’s new status in Christ. In adoption, the believer is released from slavery into freedom and maturity in Christ (Rom. 8:15). In adoption the believer is also released from bondage under the law into a new status to that law as a son of God (Gal. 4:5). In adoption the believer enjoys a new relationship wherein he may address God as “Abba, Father!” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), an intimate term of address used by a child in addressing his father. Eph. 1:5 indicates the act of adoption is connected with predestination, having taken place in eternity past but realized when the person believes in Jesus Christ.

NOTE: At this point, some may argue that I’ve missed another critical aspect of God’s part in salvation: His foreknowledge. I’ve actually intentionally left that out because, rather than being a work performed by God to bring about our salvation, foreknowledge can best be understood as God’s sovereign “reason” for saving His elect. Having foreknown (or better, “foreloved”) us (Rom. 8:29), He thus predestined us.

ii. Work of Christ

In discussing the process of salvation, the work of Christ is recognized as supreme in achieving it for us. It involves the death of Christ as a substitutionary atonement for sin in securing man's release from the penalty and bondage of sin and, of equal importance, in meeting the righteous demand of a Holy God.

iii. Work of the Holy Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit involves His **regeneration** of the sinner, the subsequent **conviction** of sin which follows, His **baptism** of the one who is saved, placing him into the body of Christ, His **sealing** of the believer until glory, and His continuous, permanent **indwelling** of him. Having looked exhaustively at the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in previous studies as well as in the Sinclair Ferguson DVD series we viewed not too long ago, we will move on in our discussion.

NOTE: Another work of God in salvation (which really involves all three Persons of the Godhead) is sanctification. It literally means "to set apart." Sanctification can be understood in three different ways: (1) **Positional sanctification**. This is the believer's position or standing before God, purposed by God the Father and based on the death of Christ. In positional sanctification we are accounted as holy before God and are declared to be saints. Paul used this word frequently to describe believers (Rom. 1:7 (note the word "as" shouldn't really be inserted here. Paul is not saying we were called "as saints" or "to be saints," he indicates that those to whom he was writing were the "beloved of God in Rome, called saints." Compare 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; and Eph. 1:1) . The second way we view sanctification is as (2) **Experiential sanctification**. Although the believer's positional sanctification is secure, his experiential sanctification may fluctuate because it relates to his daily life and experience. Paul's prayer is that believers should be sanctified completely in their experience (1 Thess. 5:23); Peter commands believers to be sanctified or holy (1 Peter 1:16). This experiential sanctification grows as the believer continues to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and is nourished by the Word of God (Ps. 119:9-16). Finally, there is (3) **Ultimate sanctification**. This aspect of sanctification is future and anticipates the final transformation of the believer into the likeness of Christ. At that time all believers will be presented to the Lord without any blemish (Eph. 5:26-27). Our ultimate sanctification is the fruition of God's having planned or purposed our salvation, Christ's having accomplished or secured it, and the Holy Spirit's having applied it to us.

b. From Man's Perspective

Having looked at salvation in terms of God's involvement, we now turn our attention to viewing it from man's perspective. It's important to note that, although man has nothing to do with his actually being saved, neither is he simply a casual bystander to whom something magical happens to effect his salvation. God is sovereign, yes, but man also bears the responsibility for believing. How does that work? I have no idea.

All I do know is that when God sovereignly saves, man WILL respond in faith. Having said that, let's look at some of the erroneous views that many have with regard to man's involvement in his salvation, some of which, at first glance, may not seem erroneous at all...

- i. Erroneous Views
 1. Repent and Believe

As we've discussed previously, this is one of the most common ways of calling men and women to salvation, isn't it? But does salvation actually work this way? No. Why not? Because it is impossible for anyone to repent without first believing in the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation. So, why do we tell people to do it? Indeed, why did Jesus Himself say "Repent and believe"? He did so for the same reason I discussed on Sunday morning was the case of the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus' calling others to do something they can't possibly do (i.e. bringing to bear the futility of law-keeping) is a means of calling them to depend on Himself as the One who IS able. A more correct understanding of this command would be "believe and repent," wouldn't it? Why? Because only those who have been given the ability to obey will do so, repenting from their sins and turning to God for forgiveness and help with future behavior.

2. Believe and be Baptized

We've discussed this as well. Many believe that Acts 2:38 is an appeal to be baptized as a means of having one's sins forgiven. In reality, Peter was simply saying, "Now that your sins have been forgiven, be baptized as a public testimony to that fact." Remember, salvation is the result of grace + nothing, including baptism.

3. Faith Precedes Regeneration

As we've also discussed, there are many who believe that faith is what causes regeneration to occur. This really speaks to why many insist that man can simply "repent and believe." Note what comes first. They fully believe that man has the ability to turn from his sins and THEN believe unto salvation. The reality, however, is that man (who is dead in sin) must first be brought to spiritual life (regeneration) before he will ever even think about truly repenting or believing. In fact, without the prerequisite regeneration of the Holy Spirit, man will simply remain dead in sin.

4. "Let go and let God"

This certainly sounds like something we should do, doesn't it? But what does this really mean? Generally speaking, this is really just another form of Christian fatalism. In other words, as Christians, we bear no responsibility at all for anything pertaining to the Christian life, especially as it pertains to salvation. We are mere bystanders and if man is to be saved, God will simply wave a magic wand and poof, he'll be saved. Many unbelievers, having misunderstood Reformed doctrine, feel this way as well, don't they?

They'll just sit here week in and week out and wait for something dramatic to happen to them. What's wrong with this view?

[Discuss]

ii. The Biblical View

Biblically speaking, saving faith involves much more than a mere intellectual assent to a set of theological facts. Once a person has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit unto new spiritual life, he or she will respond by placing their faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said this in John 6, didn't He? *"All whom the Father gives Me **will** come to Me and the one who comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out."* But aside from acknowledging, in faith, the word of the Triune God in saving him, man will also see three elements that are common to everyone's faith...

1. Knowledge

There are many Christians today who eschew or reject the notion that faith in Christ involves the intellect. There are, however, certain basic truths that must be believed which are reflective of genuine salvation. Jesus claimed to be God; belief in His deity is one of the central issues in true salvation (Rom. 10:9-10). In John 8:24, we read that unless a person believes that Jesus is all He claimed to be, he will die in his sins. Saving faith then will involve our believing the basic truths fundamental to our salvation: our sinfulness, Christ's atoning sacrifice, His bodily resurrection, etc. Remember what John said about the purpose of his writing his gospel... In John 20:31, he explains that "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

2. Conviction

Conviction of sin will also be a common element to faith (John 16:8-11). Anyone who claims to be saved and yet is not convicted of sin according to God's righteous standards presented in God's word, simply cannot be a disciple of Christ.

3. Trust

Finally, as a result of knowledge about Christ and a conviction that these things are true there must be a settled trust placed in the object of one's faith.

Next up? The Grace of God