



Soteriology

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SOTERIOLOGY

(the Teaching on Salvation)

INTRODUCTION:

The doctrine of soteriology is central to the message of Scripture. From Genesis 3 through Revelation 22 we witness the unfolding drama of redemption. No sooner had man fallen than God is seen promising deliverance. Gen 3:15. In event, word, and type the entire Old Testament anticipates the coming of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is both a record of that event and a reflection on its meaning.

The word "soteriology" comes from two Greek words: "Soteria" (salvation) and "Logia" (word, discourse). The Greek word "soter" means Saviour. Lu 1:47; 2:11; Jn 4:42. Soteriology refers specifically to the study of the work of Christ in restoring lost men to God.

There are many biblical aspects to our salvation: election, calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. No one of these scriptural terms is fully adequate to explain the meaning of salvation. In the ultimate and fullest sense no man is saved until he has been glorified. 1 Peter 1:5. Actually, it is impossible to separate these various aspects of our experience of salvation. Each element is a part of the whole and one part cannot be missing without destroying the whole. For example, if we spread out all the parts of a watch on a table, we do not have a watch. It is only when all the parts are together that we do. There is a certain order and design that make the various pieces a watch. So it is with the doctrines of salvation. They must be seen together in order to have the whole truth.

THE GRACE OF GOD

1. The Greek word for "grace" is "charis".

This word had always in it the idea of a gift, which is completely free and entirely undeserved.

In Romans 6:23 Paul uses two military words which are translated as "wages" and "gift". The Greek word translated "wages" refers to a soldier's pay, something that was due to him and could not be taken from him. The Greek word "charisma" translated "gift" refers to a totally free and unearned

gift which the army sometimes received. On special occasions, for instance on his birthday, or on his accession to the throne, or the anniversary of it, an emperor handed out a free gift of money to the army. It had not been earned; it was a present; a gift of the emperor's kindness and grace.

2. Flowing from this, "charis" is the word for God's unmerited favour. The scriptural definition of grace will never be improved upon - "The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward men... not of works of righteousness which we have done..." Titus 3:4,5.

Romans 11:5-6 also describes grace as being "unmerited favour". Grace is an attitude on God's part that proceeds entirely from within himself and that is conditioned in no way by anything in the objects of his favour. viz Rom 4:4. If salvation is given on the basis of what a man has done, then salvation is given by God as the payment of a debt. However the Scripture declares emphatically that salvation is a pure gift, something that we have not earned. Jesus taught of grace shown to the prodigal who knew only his own wretchedness (Lk 15:20) and the publican who could not speak of any righteousness of his own. Lk 18:13.

3. Theologians speak of "common grace" and "special grace".
 - a) Common grace is so called because it is common to all mankind (in spite of sin). Its benefits are experienced by the whole human race without discrimination between one person and another. It restrains sin and promotes outward order and righteousness. It gives order and a measure of moral respectability and goodness to society. It enables sinful men to act decently. It is God's favour, giving man rain, fruitful seasons, food, gladness, and other material and social blessings. Matt 5:45.
 - b) Special grace is saving grace. It draws men to Christ (Jn 6:44) and freely gives to the believing sinner eternal life. Rom 6:23. Grace is applied to the believing sinner by the Holy Spirit who is the "Spirit of grace". Zech 12:10. To reject the cleansing blood of Christ is to insult the spirit of grace (Heb 10:29) and thereby seal one's doom.

Saul is a great example of a person saved by grace. He had been a persecutor but was dramatically changed into Paul the apostle so that he was able to testify, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me". 1 Cor 15:10. All is thus ascribed to the grace of God, not merely the Christians' conversion, but also the whole course of his ministry and pilgrimage.

MAN'S PART IN SALVATION: REPENTANCE, FAITH AND CONVERSION

REPENTANCE

The first demand that the New Testament preachers made was the demand for repentance. Acts 26:20; 17:30 cf 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 20:21.

What Then is Repentance?

1. The literal meaning of the Greek word.

The Greek word for repentance is "metanoia". It means "an afterthought". "Meta" is afterwards and "noia" is "a thought". So "metanoia" simply meant literally the condition in which a man had second thoughts about something.

2. New Testament meaning

An afterthought, a second thought, is often a changed thought, a change of mind. It is often the realisation of an error or mistake. So "metanoia" comes to involve not only new judgement on some previous action, but also regret or sorrow for it. Here, then, is the New Testament meaning of repentance. Repentance is the wakened awareness of past sin.

3. What repentance involves.

a) Repentance is not simply regret for the consequences of some action. It does involve very much more. If repentance was simply regret for the consequences of some action, it might well mean that a man would do the same thing again, if he could be sure that this time he would escape the consequences of his action. That kind of regret is not so much regret for the action itself, as regret for having been found out. Repentance is a genuine sorrow for the wrong thing; a genuine shame for the feelings and the motives which inspired it; a genuine discovery that the thing was wrong in the sight of God. We must make a clear distinction between sorrow for the consequences of an action, and sorrow for the action itself.

b) So, then, repentance is a kind of self-disgust. How can this repentance be brought about in our eyes? There are two things we need to see:

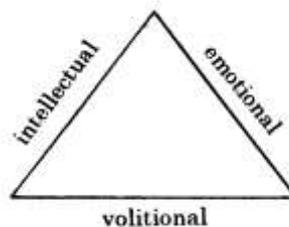
i) We need to see the cross. The Cross is the proof of the terrible things that sin can do. Sin in its terrible destructive power could and did take the loveliest life that ever lived and tried to break it forever on a Cross. There is nothing in the

universe which shows the consequences of sin like the Cross.

- ii) We need to see ourselves. A thing may be seen in its true light when it is set beside that which at its best ought to be. So when a man's life is set in the light of Christ's life a man may see clearly the ugliness of his own life.

4. The three aspects of repentance.

Repentance is like a triangle - it has three sides. And just as it takes all three sides to make a triangle, so all three aspects constitute repentance.



a) The intellectual aspect

There is little use of calling upon men to repent if we give them no idea of what to repent of. There has to be a recognition of their condition before God, that they are rebels at heart, separated from God. An examination of the New Testament will show that the call to repentance is joined to the proclamation of God's message.

David acknowledged that his sins were primarily against God. Ps 51:4. The prodigal son acknowledged that he had sinned against heaven and against his father. Lu 15:21.

b) The emotional aspect. Ps 38:18b

David mourned over his sin. Ps 51:8. Paul was three days without food or drink (Acts 9:9) while this "chief of sinners" came to regret his past career.

c) The volitional aspect.

This has to do with the will. The will is the base of the triangle, on which the whole rests, and is the most important feature of repentance. A man must act on what he knows and feels. He must decide either yes or no. It is with the will that a man makes the commitment. Not only must we recognise our sins and feel sorry

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because of them, but we must also confess and forsake them. Isa 55:7; Prov 28:13.

REPENTANCE AND RESTITUTION

When one makes restitution, that is good evidence that his repentance is genuine. John the Baptist spoke about "fruits worthy of repentance". Lu 3:8. Zacchaeus was ready to restore fourfold what he had extorted by false accusation. Lu 19:8.

It was practised in the Old Testament law. Ex 22:1; Lev 6:5; Num 5:6-7. It does not save, for we are saved by grace. But it is good evidence that the repentance is genuine.

REPENTANCE IS FROM GOD AND MAN.

- a) God is the giver of repentance. Acts 11:18 cf 2 Tim 2:25. Jesus made very clear that conviction, which is presupposed by repentance, is the work of the Holy Spirit:

"And when (the Spirit) comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." Jn 16:8-11

Jesus also said, *"No one can come to me (i.e. exercise repentance and faith) unless the Father who sent me draws him." Jn 6:44*

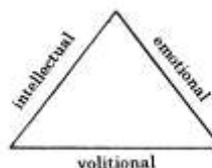
- b) But the Scripture also requires man to repent. God's Spirit aids man, but man is the one who repents. Lu 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19

FAITH.

What is Faith?

The word "believe" is the verb of which the word "faith" is a noun. ("pisteus" and "pistis") To believe and to have faith are the same. Faith is turning toward God. Acts 26:20 cf 9:35; 11:21; 15:19; 1 Peter 2:25.

The Three Aspects of Faith



1. Intellectual

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We must know who Christ is, what he has done, and what he is able to do. 1Cor 15:3-4. We are not called to put faith in someone of whom we have no knowledge. Saving faith is not a blind leap in the dark. We need to know the gospel in order to believe in Christ. Rom 10:14 cf Ps 9:10.

2. Emotional

We must not only know the truth respecting Christ; we must also believe it to be true. There must be a positive reaction to what we learn about Christ. Faith is the assent of the heart to the righteousness of what we know. The heart says yes to all that Christ is and wants to do for us.

3. Volitional

As with repentance, we see at the base of the triangle the will, the determination to accept and commit ourselves to what we believe.

Paul, speaking to Agrippa, said that Agrippa knew the Scripture and that he believed (assented to) them. Acts 26:24-29. But the king was not willing to put his trust in them.

The Scriptures frequently emphasise that man should count the cost before deciding to follow Christ. Matt 8:19-22; Lu 14:26-33. The thought of surrender is also implied in the exhortation to accept Jesus as Lord. The command is "Believe in the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16:31), and we must confess "Jesus as Lord" (Rom 10:9) to be saved. To believe in him as Lord is to recognise him as Lord and we cannot recognise him as Lord until we ourselves abdicate. This note in faith is often overlooked or even referred to a later time of consecration, but the Scripture connect it with the initial experience of salvation.

This trust is ultimately not trust in a set of facts; it is trust in a person. This is so because one would never commit himself to these facts, unless he had complete confidence in the person who made these facts known to him. The New Testament does not say, "I know what I have believed," but "I know whom I have believed". 2 Tim 1:12. In the last analysis, faith is commitment to Jesus Christ.

Faith is From God And Man

Saving faith is of both human and divine origin. Yet its origin is principally divine.

a) It is from God

Jesus said that no one could come to Christ except the Father draw him. Jn 6:44 Both repentance and faith are gracious works of God.

b) It is from man

The fact that faith is God's gift does not mean, however, that we are to wait passively and expect something that we call faith to drop from heaven upon us. Just as sunshine is God's gift, but the plant must be exposed to it in order to receive its benefits, so we must expose ourselves to God's word. Rom 10:17 cf Acts 4:4; Rom 4:19,20.

CONVERSION

What is Conversion?

1. It is repentance plus Faith

Repentance and faith are the two basic aspects of conversion. Repentance turns us from sin and produces sorrow for sin by pointing us to the cross. Faith speaks of the positive activity of man when he turns to God. He looks to God who has provided the cross as a remedy for his sin. He trusts his whole life and destiny to that God. When a man does these things, repents and believes - he converts.

2. The literal meaning of the Greek word

The words "epistrephein" and "strephein" are frequently used in the physical sense of turning or returning.

The evil spirit says: "I will return to my house from which I came". Matt 12:44. The parents of Jesus returned into Galilee. Lu 2:39. At the last time "he who is in the field is not to turn back to take his mantle". Matt 24:18. It is frequently used of a person turning around. So Jesus, when the woman touched the hem of his garment, turned around in the crowd. Mk 5:30. It is used of Mary turning around in the garden. Jn 20:14, 16.

3. Spiritual meaning

In the New Testament these two words are used most frequently of a mental or a spiritual turn. After Peter healed Aeneas, all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Acts 9:35. of Acts 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18,20.

The Turn of Conversion

A turn involves two things : It involves a turning from something and a turning towards something.

1. The essence of the turn of the Christian was that it was a turn towards God. Acts 9:35; 11:2; 15:19; 26:20.

2. It is also a turning away from certain things.
 - a) It is turning away from idols to serve the living and true God. 1 Thess 1:9. cf Acts 14:15. The Bible is always insistent on the livingness of God and the deadness of all false gods. Isa 44:9-18. A man's god is that to which he gives his life; and conversion is the time when a man gives his life not to material things but to God.
 - b) It is a turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Acts 26:18.

To turn from darkness to light means to turn from ignorance to knowledge. Conversion involves knowing what God is like. The Stoics insisted that God cannot be God unless he is completely insulated from all feeling and from every emotion; for God to be God, no one must be able in any way to influence or to affect him; for God to be God, he can know no love or grief.

However there is no point in turning to a god who by his very nature would not even notice if you turned. We cannot turn to God, unless we know that God is love.

ELECTION TO SALVATION

Introduction

One of the most difficult doctrines of the Scripture is predestination - a theme upon which volumes have been written, but also one which has separated many of God's children.

Election and predestination (foreordination) are biblical terms. The meaning of the words is reasonably clear. Integrating them into the whole scheme of theology has been the problem. But one thing is clear: God, in his free and gracious love, chose to bring men to himself. If we could understand the relation between time and eternity, we could more clearly perceive election and foreordination.

Calvin

John Calvin (1509 - 1564) was a French theologian who based his doctrine on the key ideas of the utter depravity of man and the absolute sovereignty of God. John Calvin's doctrine was not new to him; it was taught by Augustine, the great saint and theologian of the fourth century.

Some of The Chief Tenets of Calvinism.

1. God exercised an absolute and completely irresistible sovereignty over the entire universe and everything it contains, including man.

2. This sovereignty is expressed in the decrees of God, by which he governs the universe and foreordains all things that come to pass. The divine decrees cover all of God's works, in creation and redemption, and they also embrace the actions of mankind including human sin (although here the decree is reckoned to be permissive rather than causing man to sin.)
3. Man is totally depraved, and so corrupt that without God's direct help he cannot repent or believe.
4. In eternity God has elected some men to be saved, and the remainder of mankind to be damned. This does not mean that man cannot oppose God's election to salvation, but it does mean that man's opposition will not prevail. Neither does it mean that God, in the execution of his decree, overpowers the human will in a manner which is inconsistent with man's free agency. It does mean, however, that God can and does exert such an influence on the human spirit as to make it willing.
5. In so doing, God is not unjust, for he is under no obligation to save anyone. If God saves any, it is solely an expression of his love and grace.
6. Since Christ has died only for the elect, it follows that all of the elect will be saved, and will never be lost. This is the doctrine of "eternal security".

The Basis of Calvinism.

1. Calvinism believes that, in eternity, God foreknew each person who would constitute the human race, and then foreordained (predestinated) whom he would call to salvation. This is Calvinism's understanding of the word "foreknew" in 1 Peter 1:1 f and Rom 8:29.
2. Advocates of Calvinism present the following Scriptures in support of their position : Jn 10:28-29; 15:16,19; Rom 8:29-30,35; 9:14-23; 11:5-6,29; Eph 1:5; Phil 1:6; 1 Pet 1:5; Acts 13:48.

Arminius

James Arminius (1560 - 1609) was a Dutch theologian who emphasised human freedom of choice. His doctrine was similar to the pre-Augustinian fathers.

Some of The Chief Tenets of Arminianism.

1. God is sovereign, in that he does all he chooses to do, and none can withstand his will. But he himself has willed the freedom of man, thus man is able to act contrary to the divine purpose.
2. The desire of God is that all men should be saved because Christ died for all (not just the elect). Jn 1:29; 3:16; 1 Tim 2:6; Heb 2:9; 1 Jn:2:2. However