

Soteriology
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Introduction to Soteriology

Soteriology is the study of salvation. The word *soteriology* is derived from the Greek words *soter*, which means *savior*, and *logos*, which means *a word about*, or *the study of* something. The word *salvation* is used throughout the Bible of physical deliverance as well as spiritual deliverance. It means one is saved from a real harm or danger, and rescued to a safe place. Salvation in all forms is necessary because of our weakness and inability to help ourselves in a dangerous situation. According to Lewis S. Chafer, “With respect to the meaning of the word salvation, the Old and New Testaments are much alike. The word communicates the thought of deliverance, safety, preservation, soundness, restoration, and healing; but though so wide a range of human experience is expressed by the word salvation, its specific, major use is to denote a work of God in behalf of man.”¹ And McChesney adds:

In the OT the term refers to various forms of deliverance, both temporal and spiritual. God delivers His people from their enemies and from the snares of the wicked (see Psa 37:40; 59:2; 106:4). He also saves by granting forgiveness of sins, answers to prayer, joy, and peace (Psa 79:9; 69:13; 51:12)...In the NT salvation is regarded almost exclusively as from the power and dominion of sin. And of this Jesus Christ is the author (see Matt 1:21; Acts 4:12; Heb 2:10; 5:9).²

The most notable act of salvation in the OT was Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian army that was marching against them. Moses told his people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today” (Ex 14:13). The salvation was entirely of the Lord, as Moses said, “The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent” (Ex 14:14). This was a physical deliverance from a military attack. In the NT, we observe Peter being delivered from a physical drowning when he cried out to Jesus, saying, “Lord, save me!” (Matt 14:30). As Peter was sinking into the water, he was not asking for forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. He was asking to be delivered from physical drowning. We’re told “Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him” (Matt 14:31) and brought him safely into the boat. Thus, Peter was physically saved from harm.

As Christians, when we think of salvation, it most often pertains to our spiritual deliverance from the lake of fire in which we are eternally separated from God, to which all humanity is destined unless we turn to Christ and are rescued. John tells us, “if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). Spiritual salvation is the most important kind of salvation mentioned in the Bible, for it matters little if one is rescued a thousand times from physical danger, but ultimately fails to receive deliverance from the danger of hell. God loves everyone and is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). And He has made a way for lost sinners to be saved from hell and brought to heaven, and this through His Son, Jesus, for “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 5.

² E. McChesney, “Salvation,” ed. Merrill F. Unger and R.K. Harrison, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1114.

heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Charles Ryrie notes:

The Bible indicates at least three reasons that God wanted to save sinners. (1) This was the greatest and most concrete demonstration of the love of God. His good gifts in nature and through His providential care (great as they are) do not hold a candle to the gift of His Son to be our Savior. John 3:16 reminds us that His love was shown in His gift, and Romans 5:8 says that God proved conclusively that He loved us by the death of Christ. (2) Salvation also gives God a display of His grace throughout all eternity (Eph 2:7). Each saved person will be a special trophy of God’s grace forever. Only redeemed human beings can provide this display. (3) God also wanted a people who would do good works in this life and thus give the world a glimpse, albeit imperfect, of God who is good (Eph 2:10). Without the salvation Christ provided, these things would not be possible.³

God’s love for lost humanity is what motivated Him to act. Scripture reveals, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). And, “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10). And, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Chafer states, “The greatest of all motives which actuates God in the exercise of His saving grace is the satisfying of His own infinite love for those ruined by sin. In this may be seen the truth that the salvation of a soul means infinitely more to God than it could ever mean to the one who is saved.”⁴

God saves us because we are lost in sin and helpless to save ourselves. If we could save ourselves, then the death of Christ would have been unnecessary. But we cannot save ourselves, as our sin renders us helpless before God. According to Norman Geisler, “Sin is the precondition for salvation; salvation isn’t necessary unless there are sinners in need of being saved. As to the origin of salvation, there is universal agreement among orthodox theologians: God is the author of our salvation, for whereas human sin originated with human beings on earth, salvation originated with God in heaven.”⁵ A weak understanding of God’s work in salvation will produce a weak gospel, one that tends to emphasize human good and man’s ability to save himself, or to participate in that salvation. When we understand the total depravity of all mankind, and that we are totally lost and unable to save ourselves, only then does the work of God through Christ come into its full glory, and love and grace become so pronounced, that lost sinners realize their utterly helpless condition, and turn to Christ alone for that salvation which cannot be secured by any other means. According to Robert Lightner, “The Bible is explicit about the condition of all who have not been born again. They are lost (Luke 19:10), condemned (John 3:18), under God’s wrath (John 3:36), dead in

³ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 318–320.

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 7.

⁵ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 181.

trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1), having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph 2:12), and unrighteous (Rom 1:19-32).”⁶

The price of our salvation was very costly to God. It cost Him His Son, Who came into the world and took upon Himself humanity (Matt 1:1, 18; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1, 14), lived a sinless life (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5), willingly went to the cross and bore our sin (Isa 53:4-11; John 10:17-18; 1 Pet 2:24), was buried and raised again on the third day (Luke 24:46; 1 Cor 15:3-4), never to die again (Rom 6:9). Jesus paid our sin debt in full (Rom 6:10; Heb 9:28; 10:12, 14), and now salvation is offered as a free gift to all who will accept it by faith alone in Christ alone. Lightner states, “Salvation is the most wonderful gift in all the world. To be saved, or born again, is to be translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). It is to be made acceptable before God. His salvation is complete and without cost to the sinner. The total price has been paid. The work is finished!”⁷ Those who have trusted Christ as Savior are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).

It’s important to understand that Christ died for only one kind of person: the lost sinner who stands condemned before a holy and righteous God. If we don’t see ourselves from the divine perspective, as lost and in need of a Savior, then Christ and His work on the cross will be rejected. The cross is God’s righteous solution to the problem of sin, as well as His greatest display of love toward sinners. At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness required, and pardons the sinner as His love desires. To understand the cross of Christ is to understand the heart of God toward a fallen world He wants to save.

We don’t earn or deserve God’s kindness in any way, for the record of Scripture is that we are *helpless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies* of God (Rom 5:6-10) who were reconciled to Him “through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). Salvation is never what we do for God; rather, it’s what He’s done for us through the death of His Son, who paid the full penalty for all our sins on the cross at Calvary. Salvation is a work of God alone. We bring nothing of worth to God. Nothing at all. Our contribution to salvation is sin and death, both of which Christ bore on the cross. Jesus freely took our sins upon Himself on the cross, and paid the penalty for our sins and died the death we deserve. That’s love. That’s grace. If we got what we deserved in this life, we would all be dead and forever condemned in the lake of fire. Salvation is based entirely on the merit of Christ, not on anything we do. It is the work of Christ and nothing else. Robert B. Thieme Jr. states:

Every human being needs to be saved, because everyone enters this world in a state of spiritual death, total depravity, and total separation from God. Because man is born hopelessly lost from God and helpless to do anything about it, God, in His grace, designed a perfect plan to reconcile man to Himself. God the Son took the burden of responsibility: He became true humanity and remained sinless so that He could be judged for the sins of the world (1 Pet 3:18). While Jesus Christ hung on the cross, God the Father poured the full wrath of His justice upon the Son He loved so perfectly (Matt 27:46; Rom 5:8–10; 2 Cor 5:21). Christ “bore our sins in His body” (1 Pet 2:24) and took the punishment in our place. God’s righteous standard approved of Jesus’ sacrifice as payment for all human sins.

⁶ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology: A Historical, Biblical, and Contemporary Survey and Review* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995), 188.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

Hence, when every last transgression had been judged, Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Salvation work was complete.⁸

Some erroneously think salvation is offered to those who are worthy, who live a good life and please God through good works. The Bible does not teach this. The claim of Scripture is that “there are none righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10), “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Sin is anything that is contrary to the holy character of God. The Bible teaches that everyone is a sinner (1 Ki 8:46; Prov 20:9; Eccl 7:20; Isa 53:6; 64:6; Jer 17:9; Mark 7:20-23; Rom 3:9-23; 7:18-21; Gal 3:22; Eph 2:1-3; 1 John 1:8-10). Sin separates us from God and renders us helpless to save ourselves (Isa 59:2; Rom 5:6-10; Eph 2:1-3). Lightner states, “Man’s need of salvation is occasioned by his sin and God’s estimate of him. Since it is God who must be pleased, it does not matter what man thinks of himself or how he proposes to be acceptable to God. What really matters is what God thinks, what he has done to save man, and what he expects, and in fact, demands of man.”⁹ When the subject of sin is studied, it results in a basic threefold classification that we are sinners *in Adam* (Psa 51:5; Rom 5:12, 19; 1 Cor 15:21-22), sinners by *nature* (Rom 7:14-25; Gal 5:17), and sinners by *choice* (Jam 1:14-15).

To be sinners *in Adam* means his original sin, the sin that was committed in the garden of Eden, is transmitted to all his descendants (Gen 2:16-17; 3:1-24). Adam is the head of the human race. When Adam sinned, we all sinned with him. His fallen position is our fallen position. His guilt is our guilt. Adam’s sin is imputed to all his offspring, for “through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12; cf., 1 Cor 15:21-22). David wrote, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Psa 51:5). Concerning this verse, Allen Ross states, David “was affirming that from the very beginning of his existence there had never been a time that he had not been in a sinful state—he was human after all. The verse does not mean that a little baby is a wicked sinner; but it does mean that everyone who is born is born in a state or condition of sin, and that state unchecked will naturally lead to acts of sin.”¹⁰ Being born *in Adam* means we are born with a *sinful nature*. Ryrie notes, “Adam’s original sin produced that moral corruption of nature that was transmitted by inheritance to each succeeding generation.”¹¹ The sin nature is resident in every person; both saved and unsaved, and is the source of internal temptation. Warren Wiersbe states, “The *flesh* refers to that fallen nature that we were born with, that wants to control the body and the mind and make us disobey God.”¹² Since the fall of Adam, every person is born with a sin nature, and it is this nature that internally motivates us to rebel against all legitimate forms of authority, both human and divine. When we yield to temptation, we produce *personal sin*, which is any thought, word, or action that contrary to the holy character of God. James wrote, “each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin” (Jam 1:14-15a).

⁸ R. B. Thieme, Jr. “Salvation”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, (Houston, TX., R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2022), 232.

⁹ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology: A Historical, Biblical, and Contemporary Survey and Review* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995), 189.

¹⁰ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms 1–89: Commentary*, vol. 2, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011–2013), 187.

¹¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 252.

¹² Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Colorado Springs, Col., Victor Publishing, 2001), 18.

Concerning the transmission of original sin, Jesus is the sole exception, for Mary's virgin conception meant Jesus was not born with the taint of original sin. Being free from original sin, Jesus also had no sin nature. Furthermore, Jesus lived His entire life and committed no personal sin. Scripture reveals Jesus "knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21), was "without sin" (Heb 4:15), "committed no sin" (1 Pet 2:22), and in whom "there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). His sinless life qualified Him to die a substitutionary death in our place, "the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). Jesus died for everyone and paid the penalty for our sin (John 3:16; Heb 2:9; 1 John 2:2). Though His death is sufficient for all to be saved (unlimited atonement), the benefits of the cross are applied only to those who believe in Him.

Related to the subject of sin is the biblical concept of *total depravity*, which means that sin permeates every aspect of our being; our mind, will, sensibilities and flesh are all contaminated by sin. *Total depravity* does not mean we are as bad as we can be, for there are many moral unbelievers in the world. Being contaminated by sin means whatever morality we produce can never measure up to the perfect righteousness God expects. Is there any person who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?" (Prov 20:9). The answer is an emphatic NO! The human heart is corrupt, for "the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick" (Jer 17:9). And "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins" (Eccl 7:20), and "There is none righteous; not even one. There is none who understands; there is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become useless. There is none who does good, there is not even one" (Rom 3:10-12; cf. Rom 8:8). Some might argue that we can perform good works and help to save ourselves. This is wrong. Scripture states, "your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God" (Isa 59:2), "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (Isa 64:6), and we are "justified by faith apart from works of the Law" (Rom 3:28), and salvation comes "to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly" (Rom 4:5), and we are "not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Gal 2:16), "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9), and God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (2 Tim 1:9), and "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5). By human estimation, even the worst person can do some good. But human estimation is lower than God's estimation and it is God's standards that define what is truly good. According to Ryrie, "Total depravity must always be measured against God's holiness. Relative goodness exists in people. They can do good works, which are appreciated by others. But nothing that anyone can do will gain salvational merit or favor in the sight of a holy God."¹³ J. I. Packer states:

The phrase *total depravity* is commonly used to make explicit the implications of original sin. It signifies a corruption of our moral and spiritual nature that is total not in degree (for no one is as bad as he or she might be) but in extent. It declares that no part of us is untouched by sin, and therefore no action of ours is as good as it should be, and

¹³ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 253.

consequently nothing in us or about us ever appears meritorious in God's eyes. We cannot earn God's favor, no matter what we do; unless grace saves us, we are lost.¹⁴

Election is another doctrine within the scope of soteriology. Election is a biblical teaching that every serious student of the Bible must address at some time. It addresses issues related to God's sovereignty and human volition, sin and salvation, justice and mercy, foreknowledge and faith. Election is a difficult doctrine to fully understand. And, when discussing it with others, it's always best to keep love and grace in the discussion. Lewis Chafer states, "The doctrine of Election is a cardinal teaching of the Scriptures. Doubtless, it is attended with difficulties which are a burden upon all systems of theology alike. However, no word of God may be altered or neglected. No little help is gained when it is remembered that revelation and not reason is the guide to faith. When the former has spoken the latter is appointed to listen and acquiesce."¹⁵ Charles Ryrie adds, "No human mind will ever harmonize sovereignty and free will, but ignoring or downplaying one or the other in the interests of a supposed harmony will solve nothing."¹⁶ From the doctrinal statement of Tyndale Theological Seminary, it is noted, "The sovereignty of God also extends to the doctrine of divine election whereby those chosen by the council of the Lord's own will, shall come to Him in faith. And yet, even though difficult to reconcile in human understanding, the sovereignty of God does not remove the responsibility of man."¹⁷ Election does not remove the responsibility to believe in Christ as Savior (Rom 10:13-14). Faith is non-meritorious, having no saving value in itself. Christ alone saves. In order for people to be saved, they must believe in Jesus as the Savior (1 Cor 15:3-4). From the human side of salvation, faith in Jesus is the necessary response to God's call, and no one can be saved any other way (John 14:6; Acts 16:31).

God's gospel message is simple in its presentation (1 Cor 15:3-4). It is a message of love and grace (John 3:16-17; Eph 2:8-9). It centers at the cross where Jesus died for all our sins (1 Cor 1:18, 21; 15:3-4; Col 2:13-14; 1 Pet 2:24). The gospel message only makes sense when we understand that God is holy, all mankind is sinful, and that Jesus necessarily died as our substitute. When presenting the gospel it is essential to proclaim that salvation is completely the work of God. Salvation is a free gift to us, paid in full by the Lord Jesus, who died in our place, the "just for the unjust" (1 Pet 3:18), and bore the punishment that rightfully belongs to us. This means we bring nothing to God. Nothing at all! Scripture reveals we are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24), and "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). Paul states, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9). The good news is that we are saved completely by what Jesus accomplished for us at the cross and not by any good works we produce before, during, or after salvation. Chafer states, "Most emphatic is the truth thus declared, that salvation is a divine undertaking on the basis of pure grace in which no human works or merit may enter."¹⁸

¹⁴ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993).

¹⁵ Lewis S. Chafer, "Biblical Theism Divine Decrees" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 96 (1939): 268.

¹⁶ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 359.

¹⁷ Doctrinal Statement, *Tyndale Theological Seminary and Biblical Institute*, <https://tyndale.edu/about/doctrine/>

¹⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 7.

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Grace is God's unmerited favor toward us. Grace is sometimes used as an acronym for **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. The challenge for us is to turn from human works, whatever they may be, and to cast ourselves completely on Christ as our Savior. Fruchtenbaum states, "In more than two hundred cases where the Scriptures give a condition for salvation, faith or belief is the one and only condition. This is important to remember. If there are 'problem passages,' one should not interpret the two hundred clear passages by the few minor problem passages. Rather, one should try to interpret the few problem passages by the two hundred clear passages."¹⁹ Salvation is "the gift of God" (Eph 2:8), "according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (2 Tim 1:9), and "according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5). God has prepared good works to follow our salvation (Eph 2:10), but they are never the condition of it. The matter is simple: Salvation comes to those who believe in Christ as their Savior (John 3:16; 20:31; Acts 16:30-31). And when we trust in Christ as our Savior, God saves from the penalty of sin (John 5:24; Rom 6:23; 8:1), the power of sin (Rom 6:11; 8:13), and ultimately the presence of sin (Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2, 5).

The gospel that saves spiritually is specific in its content. And to preach any other gospel will not only result in a failure for the lost to obtain that which is necessary for entrance into heaven, but it will bring great judgment upon the one who proclaims it. The apostle Paul wrote, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Gal 1:8-9). It is noteworthy that Paul includes himself in this warning, as the gospel that was delivered to him, once it was received, could not be changed, even by one so great as the apostle Paul himself. Concerning this verse, Arnold Fruchtenbaum comments:

In verses 8–9, Paul pronounces the *anathema*, which is a rebuke against false teachers. Anyone who teaches a gospel that is different from the gospel they have received is to be *anathema*. Another gospel is any gospel other than the gospel of the grace of God. Any addition to the simple statement that salvation is by grace through faith is another gospel. Any addition to the gospel—be it baptism, tongues, ceremonies, church membership, repentance—perverts the gospel and is *anathema*.²⁰

Lewis Chafer adds:

This anathema has never been revoked, nor could it be so long as the saving grace of God is to be proclaimed to a lost world. From the human point of view, a misrepresentation of the gospel might so misguide a soul that the way of life is missed forever. It behooves the doctor of souls to know the precise remedy he is appointed to administer. A medical doctor may, by an error, terminate what at best is only a brief life on earth. The doctor of souls is dealing with eternal destiny. Having given His Son to die for lost men, God cannot but be exacting about how that great benefit is presented, nor should He be deemed unjust if He pronounces an anathema on those who pervert the one and only way of salvation which

¹⁹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Faith Alone: The Condition of Our Salvation: An Exposition of the Book of Galatians and Other Relevant Topics*, ed. Christiane Jurik, Second Edition. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2016), 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

was purchased at so great a cost. A sensitive man, when realizing these eternal issues, might shrink from so great a responsibility, but God has not called His messengers to such a failure. He enjoins them to “preach the word” and assures them of His unfailing presence and enabling power. Probably at no point in the whole field of theological truth is the injunction more applicable which says, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).²¹

In conclusion, the gospel is the solution to a problem. There are two parts to the problem. *First*, God is holy (Psa 99:9; Isa 6:3), which means He is positively righteous and completely set apart from sin (Psa 99:9; 1 Pet 1:14-16). Because God is holy, He cannot have anything to do with sin except to condemn it. The Scripture states, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Hab 1:13), and “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). *Second*, all mankind is sinful and separated from God (Rom 3:10-23). We are sinners in Adam (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21-22), sinners by nature (Rom 7:14-25; 13:12-14), and sinners by choice (Isa 59:2; Jam 1:14-15). To further complicate the problem, we are helpless to solve the sin problem and save ourselves (Rom 5:6-10; Eph 2:1-3). Good works have no saving merit before God (Isa 64:6; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). We cannot save ourselves any more than we can jump across the Grand Canyon or throw rocks and hit the moon. But God, because of His mercy and love toward us (John 3:16; Eph 2:3-7), did for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He provided a solution to the problem of sin, and that solution is the cross of Christ (1 Cor 1:18). God the Son—the second Person of the Trinity—came into the world by virgin human birth (Luke 1:26-38; cf., John 1:1, 14), lived a perfectly righteous life (Matt 5:17; John 17:4), and willingly died in our place and bore the punishment for our sins. Jesus solved both problems: 1) He lived the righteous life that God demands and committed no sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5), and 2) He died for us on the cross and paid the penalty for all our sins (Mark 10:45; Rom 5:6-10; 1 John 2:2). The gospel message is that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). Jesus died in our place, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). In order for us to be reconciled to God, we must simply trust in Jesus as our Savior (John 3:16; Acts 16:30-31). When we trust in Christ as our Savior, we are forgiven all our sins (Eph 1:7; Col. 1:14), given eternal life (John 3:16; 10:27-28), and receive the righteousness of God as a free gift (Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). And when we trust in Christ as our Savior, God saves us from the penalty of sin (John 5:24; Rom 6:23; 8:1), the power of sin (Rom 6:11; 8:13), and ultimately the presence of sin (Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2, 5).

Soteriology touches a number of biblical topics such as the holiness of God, the sinfulness of mankind, election, atonement, penal substitution, redemption, faith, regeneration, forgiveness, expiation, justification, propitiation, and reconciliation, just to name a few. These and other topics will be addressed throughout this volume.

²¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, p. 10.

