

Soteriology
A Basic Introduction

Dr. Steven R. Cook

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Soteriology

A Basic Introduction

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First Edition

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Introduction

Soteriology is the study of salvation.¹ The word comes from the Greek *sōtēria* (σωτηρία), which means “salvation” or “deliverance,” and *logos* (λόγος), which means “a word about,” or “the study of” something. Soteriology is the sphere of systematic theology that speaks to the nature, means, scope, and purpose of salvation. It is an important theme that runs throughout Scripture and reveals the God who saves. It touches on the attributes of God such as His holiness, righteousness and justice concerning sin, as well as His love, mercy, grace and goodness to save lost sinners who cannot save themselves.

Throughout this book, we will examine the roles of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit concerning our salvation. We will also explore the sinfulness of mankind and our total unworthiness to merit salvation by means of our good works. Our salvation was accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. While Jesus hung between heaven and earth, He willingly bore the punishment for our sins and paid our sin debt in full. Having accomplished our salvation at the cross, forgiveness of sins and the free gift of eternal life are available to all who come to Jesus in simple faith. The good news of the Gospel is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, was raised again on the third day, and was seen by many, as the Scripture reveals (1 Cor 15:3-8).

Once we understand who Jesus is as the eternal Son of God (Col 2:9; Heb 1:8), the second member of the Trinity, and God incarnate (John 1:1, 14), we can believe in Him as our Savior (John 3:15-16; Acts 4:12; 16:31). Through faith in

¹ Some of the material in this book is taken from articles or other books I've written.

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Christ, we receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:43; Eph 1:7) and eternal life (John 6:40; 10:28). Salvation is by grace alone (totally undeserved), through faith alone (not by works), and in Christ alone (Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). It is a gift from God to us (Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8-9). We simply come with the empty hands of faith, trusting in Christ alone as our Savior.

I pray that these lessons are helpful to you and that you will take the time to look up each Scripture reference to see its significance as it relates to the subject of soteriology. Above all, my concern in this book is evangelistic in nature, as I desire the reader to understand the Gospel and to believe in Christ for eternal life. I also hope those who are saved will have a better understanding of the Gospel message so that you can share Christ with others, that they might believe in Him and be saved.

Dr. Steven R. Cook

Introduction

Definition of Salvation in the OT

Definition of Salvation in the OT

The most common word for salvation in the Hebrew OT is *yasha* (יָשַׁע - sometimes as יְשׁוּעָה, *yeshuah*) which means “*deliverance, rescue, salvation, also safety, [and] welfare.*”¹ God is said to deliver His people from military attacks (2 Sam 22:3-4; 1 Ch 16:35; Psa 3:6-8), fear (Psa 34:4), troubles (Psa 34:17), or physical death (Psa 56:13).² Earl Radmacher notes, “Often the words save and salvation refer to physical not spiritual deliverance. This is especially true in the Old Testament. People were ‘saved’ (rescued or delivered) from enemies on the battlefield (Deut 20:4), from the lion’s mouth (Dan 6:20), and from the wicked (Psa 59:2).”³ According to Charles Ryrie:

The most important Hebrew root word related to salvation in the Old Testament is *yasha*. Originally it meant to be roomy or broad in contrast to narrowness or oppression. Thus it signifies freedom from what binds or restricts, and it came to mean deliverance, liberation, or giving width and breadth to something. Sometimes this deliverance came through the agency of man (e.g., through judges, Judg 2:18; 6:14; 8:22; or kings, 1 Sam 23:2), and sometimes through the agency of Yahweh (Pss 20:6; 34:6; Isa 61:10; Ezek 37:23). Sometimes salvation is individual (Psa 86:1–2) and

¹ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 447.

² For other Hebrew words, see W. L. Liefeld, “Salvation,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, vol. 4, (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), p. 289.

³ Earl Radmacher, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, “Salvation”, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 806.

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sometimes corporate, that is, of the nation (Isa 12:2, though all the world will share in it, Isa 45:22; 49:6).⁴

Yahweh is repeatedly referred to as the “the God of my salvation” (Psa 18:46; cf., Psa 25:5; 27:9; 51:14; 88:1; Isa 12:2; 17:10; Mic 7:7; Hab 3:18), and Jonah said, “Salvation is from the LORD” (Jon 2:9). In helpless situations, only God could save His people (Isa 43:11; cf., Isa 45:5-7, 22), and He saved them primarily for His own glory and reputation, as the psalmist states, “He saved them for the sake of His name, that He might make His power known” (Psa 106:8).

When delivering His people from a military threat, there were times when God called His people to do nothing, but watch Him fight their battles (2 Ch 20:17; Hos 1:7). When Israel left Egypt and Pharaoh’s army pursued them, Moses told the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation [*yeshuah*] of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent” (Ex 14:13-14). Here, the Lord fought alone, killing the Egyptian soldiers who were pursuing His people for the purpose of killing them (see Ex 14:22-31). However, there were times when God required His people to take up arms and engage their enemy, and in those moments He would fight with them, ensuring their victory. For example, when Israel was to enter the land of Canaan, Moses told the people, “the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save [*yasha*] you” (Deut 20:4). As Israel’s army fought the wicked Canaanites, God would be *with* them to secure their victory. And David, when standing against Goliath, said, “the battle is the LORD’S and He will give you into our hands” (1 Sam

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 321.

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17:47), and then he picked up his sling and a stone and struck his enemy with a mortal blow (1 Sam 17:48-49). God brought salvation through David, His servant. Liefeld states, “Although military leaders and others bring salvation in specific circumstances, ultimately it is God alone who is the true Savior. Israel had to learn not to trust human wisdom or military strength but to recognize God as the only source of deliverance.”⁵ Solomon states the matter well, saying, “The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD” (Prov 21:31). Today, we might say, the soldier is to train well and keep his weapons clean, ready for action, but always realize it is ultimately God who gives the victory.

When God rescued His people from danger, it was often followed with a natural expression of worship to Him. According to Hartley:

Singing gives expression to the joy attending God’s salvation. Joy is frequently mentioned as man’s inner response to God’s victory (e.g., Psa 13:5). Further those who have received Yahweh’s help feel compelled to share it with others; “I have not hid thy saving help within my heart, I have spoken of thy faithfulness and thy salvation” (Psa 40:10). Thus God’s salvation fills life with meaning and joy.⁶

There was also a spiritual and eternal salvation for individuals who placed their faith in God. For example, in Genesis 15:6, we’re informed that Abram “believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen

⁵ W. L. Liefeld, “Salvation,” ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, vol. 4 (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 289.

⁶ John E. Hartley, “929 נַפְשׁוֹ,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 416.

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15:6). Henry Morris states, “Here is the great principle of true salvation, set forth for the first time in the Bible. Not by works do men attain or manifest righteousness, but by faith. Because they believe in the Word of God, He credits them with perfect righteousness and therefore enables sinful men to be made fit for the fellowship of a holy God.”⁷ And Ryrie adds, “Faith was the necessary condition for salvation in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Abraham believed in the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him for righteousness (Gen 15:6). The Hebrew prefix *beth* indicates that Abraham confidently rested his faith on God (cf. Ex 14:31; Jon 3:5).”⁸

⁷ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976), 325.

⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 321.

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Definition of Salvation in the NT

The concept of salvation in the NT derives from three words. First is the verb *sozo* (σώζω), which refers to the act of physical deliverance in some biblical passages (Matt 8:25; 14:30; Mark 13:20; Luke 6:9; John 11:12; Acts 27:20, 31), and spiritual deliverance in others (Luke 7:50; 19:10; John 12:47; 1 Cor 1:21; Tit 3:5). As to our spiritual deliverance, we are saved from the penalty of sin (Rom 8:1, 33-34; Eph 2:8-9), the power of sin (Rom 6:11; Col 3:5), and ultimately the presence of sin (Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2, 5). Second is the noun *soter* (σωτήρ), which means *Savior*, and refers to the agent of salvation, the one who rescues or delivers another from harm or danger (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph 5:23; Phil 3:20). Third is the noun *soteria* (σωτηρία), which refers to the provision of salvation, rescue, or deliverance brought by another (Luke 1:69; 19:9; John 4:22; Acts 7:25; 13:26, 47; Rom 1:16; 2 Cor 1:6; 6:2; Eph 1:13; Phil 1:28; 2:12; 2 Tim 2:10; Heb 1:14; 9:28; 1 Pet 1:5, 9; 2 Pet 3:15).

The Greek words in the NT communicate the basic meaning of *yasha* in the Hebrew OT. Radmacher notes, “In the New Testament the verb *sōzō* (“to save”) and the nouns *sōtēr* (“Savior”) and *sōtēria* (“salvation”) parallel the Hebrew word and its derivatives. Thus the Old Testament concept of deliverance is carried over to the New Testament.”¹ Ryrie agrees, saying:

In both the Septuagint and the New Testament the Greek verb *sōzō* and its cognates *sōtēr* and *sōtēria* usually translate *yasha*, and its respective nouns.

¹ Earl Radmacher, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, “Salvation” *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 805.

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However, a number of times the *sōzō* group translates shalom, peace or wholeness, and its cognates. Thus salvation can mean cure, recovery, remedy, rescue, redemption, or welfare. This can be related to preservation from danger, disease, or death (Matt 9:22; Acts 27:20, 31, 34; Heb 5:7).²

Earl Radmacher adds:

A number of times, however, *sōtēria* translates *siālôm* (“peace” or “wholeness”), which broadens the idea of rescue or deliverance to include recovery, safety, and preservation. There is a progression in these concepts: (a) rescue from imminent and life-threatening danger to (b) a place of safety and security and (c) a position of wholeness and soundness. The narrowness and restriction created by danger is replaced by the “breadth” of liberation in salvation. Visualize a person on the *Titanic* facing the imminent expectation of drowning and death, but then being placed in a lifeboat. That is *rescue*. Then picture the person now in the lifeboat removed from danger and death. That is *safety*. Now picture an ocean liner coming alongside the lifeboat and hoisting it and its passengers aboard ship. Now they enjoy *security* and *soundness* of mind. All three ideas are included in the biblical concept of salvation.³

The majority of usages of salvation in the NT refer to physical healing or deliverance from what injures, restricts, or threatens harm. For example, when Jesus was traveling between Samaria and Galilee, He healed ten men of leprosy

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 321–322.

³ Earl Radmacher, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, “Salvation”, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 805–806.

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(Luke 17:11-14), and when one of them returned to thank Him (Luke 17:15-16), He told the man, “your faith has made you well [*sozo*]” (Luke 17:19). In this context, the Greek verb *sozo* refers to physical deliverance from an infirmity. On another occasion, when Jesus was approaching the city of Jericho, a blind man called out for Jesus to have mercy on him (Luke 18:35-41), and Jesus healed the man, saying, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well [*sozo*]” (Luke 18:42). Again, this refers to physical healing. An example of deliverance from physical danger is observed when Jesus came to His disciples when they were on a stormy sea (Matt 14:22-27). When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he called out to the Lord and asked to come to Him (Matt 14:28-29). However, as Peter was walking on the water, He took his eyes off Jesus and began looking at the stormy wind, and “he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me! [*sozo*]’” (Matt 14:30). Peter was not asking for forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life; rather, he was asking Jesus to save him from physical harm as he sinking into the sea. Earl Radmacher states:

When the New Testament uses *save* and *salvation* to refer to physical deliverance, those instances are more individual than national. Also the New Testament occurrences suggest not only rescue but also remedy and recovery. A graphic example of rescue from imminent death is God’s sparing Paul’s life in the shipwreck on his way to Rome (Acts 27:20, 31, 34). This case is of special interest in that God promised deliverance in advance (Acts 27:23–24), and Paul confidently moved ahead on those promises (Acts 27:25, 34). In a physical sense salvation refers to being taken from danger to safety (Phil 1:19), from disease

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to health (Jam 5:15), and from death to life (Jam 5:20).⁴

Often, as Christians, we think of salvation in the spiritual sense, in which we are delivered from our sins and made right with God because of the finished work of Christ on the cross. As believers, we have been “reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). We have been made spiritually alive, and “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3). We should realize our salvation appears in three tenses. Chafer states:

In its broadest significance, the doctrine of salvation includes every divine undertaking for the believer from his deliverance out of the lost estate to his final presentation in glory conformed to the image of Christ. Since the divine objective is thus all-inclusive, the theme is divided naturally into three tenses: (a) The Christian *was* saved when he believed (Luke 7:50; Acts 16:30–31; 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15; Eph 2:8; 2 Tim 1:9). This past-tense aspect of it is the essential and unchanging fact of salvation. At the moment of believing, the saved one is completely delivered from his lost estate, cleansed, forgiven, justified, born of God, clothed in the merit of Christ, freed from all condemnation, and safe for evermore. (b) The believer is *being* saved from the dominion of sin (Rom 6:1–14; 8:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 2:20; 4:19; Phil 1:19; 2:12; 2 Th 2:13). In this second tense of salvation the believer is being divinely preserved and sanctified. (c) The believer is *yet* to be saved from the presence of sin when presented faultless in glory (Rom 13:11; 1 Th 5:8; Heb 1:14; 9:28; 1 Pet 1:3–5; 1 John 3:1–3). To

⁴ Ibid., 806.

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this may be added other passages which, each in turn, present all three tenses or aspects of salvation—1 Cor 1:30; Phil 1:6; Eph 5:25–27; 1 Th 1:9–10; Tit 2:11–13.⁵

Our salvation is entirely the work of God through Christ (John 3:16), who took our sin upon Himself on the cross and paid the penalty for it, having been judged in our place; “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). And this salvation is found exclusively in Christ, for “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). One needs only Christ to be saved. Concerning the word *salvation*, Ryrie notes, “the word usage does not begin to fathom all that the biblical revelation declares about salvation. Other concepts like sacrifice, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, and justification are vital to a full understanding of the doctrine.”⁶

⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 6.

⁶ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 321–322.

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Who is the One Who Saves?

There are four basic views concerning who saves. First is *autosoterism* (*auto* = self + *soter* = savior) which is a belief that entrance into heaven is entirely by good works. Autosoterists don't feel they need salvation from an outside source. Their good works are enough. Second is *syntheosoterism* (*syn* = with + *theo* = God + *soter* = savior) which is a belief that people partner with God and contribute to their initial salvation by good works, or a promise to perform them. These frontload the gospel with some human requirement in addition to faith in Jesus (i.e., turn from all their sin, keep the Sabbath, water baptism, etc.). Third is *posttheosoterism* (*post* – after + *theo* = God + *soter* = savior) which is the belief that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, but later, after being saved, the Christians are persuaded they must perform good works to keep themselves saved (like the Christians in Galatia). Last is *sola theosoterism* (*sola* = alone + *theo* = God + *soter* = savior), which is the belief that salvation is entirely a work of God through Christ and is provided by grace alone, though faith alone, in Christ alone, plus nothing more. In this view, salvation is a gift from God, freely given and freely received with no requirement of good works before, during, or after receiving salvation. These understand that good works should follow salvation (Eph 2:10), but they are never the condition of it.

The *autosoterists* believe that, from beginning to end, they save themselves by adhering to a moral code that will secure their entrance into heaven. In this system of thought, the Bible becomes a moral guide to one's path to heaven (perhaps among other guides). I've personally heard people say, "I'll keep the Ten Commandments and hope God lets me into heaven", or "I'll love God and my neighbor and trust that He will let me into His kingdom when I die." Historically, this

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would be similar to Pelagianism, a teaching derived from a British monk named Pelagius who lived and preached in Rome circa A.D. 400. According to Ryrie, Pelagius “believed that since God would not command anything that was not possible, and that since He has commanded men to be holy, everyone therefore can live a life that is free from sin.”¹ In this teaching, a person needs only follow God’s laws to be saved from hell and accepted into heaven. From beginning to end, this is a works-salvation.

The problem with *autosoterism*—among several—is that those who think they can save themselves by works fail to grasp God’s absolute standard of righteousness to gain entrance into heaven. The Bible reveals God is holy (Psa 99:9; Isa 6:3), which means He is perfectly 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). Autosoterists also fail to understand the biblical teaching about sin and total depravity, in which sin permeates every aspect of our being—intellect, body, will, and sensibilities—and that we are helpless to correct our fallen position. The biblical teaching is that 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), sinners by choice (Isa 59:2; Jam 1:14-15), and completely 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; Rom 4:4-5; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). Paul wrote, “we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 254.

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the Law” (Rom 3:28), and “a man is 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).

Furthermore, autosoterists are trapped in a vague system of rules-for-salvation that can never provide assurance of their salvation. No matter how much good they do, there is always that nagging question, “have I done enough?” The reason they can never have assurance of their salvation is because the Bible does not teach that salvation is by human works, either in total or in part. Those who approach God by their works are in want of any passage of Scripture that can provide them assurance they’ve done enough to secure their place in heaven. For if one performs a hundred good works during a lifetime, how do they know that God doesn’t require a hundred and one, or a hundred and two? They don’t, because the Bible does not teach salvation by works. Autosoterists are not saved, as they trust entirely in their good works to save them.

The *syntheosoterists* are those who think good works are required in addition to their initial act of faith in Jesus. These teach faith in Christ, but then muddy the gospel by adding something we do, such as turning from sins, keeping the Sabbath, water baptism, promising to live a moral life, joining a church, receiving sacraments, etc. I don’t believe these persons are saved, as human activity is added to the gospel message from the beginning. We observe an example of this in the early church in which “Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). This teaching caused a huge reaction in Paul and Barnabas, who had “great dissension and debate with them” (Acts 15:2). The simple gospel message was: “we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11). But

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some Judaizers from Judea were presenting a false gospel which frontloaded the message with a requirement to follow to the Law of Moses; specifically, circumcision. Concerning Acts 15:1, Arnold Fruchtenbaum states:

Verse 1 describes the issue that led to the debate: Gentile circumcision. After their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas gave a report to the church of Antioch and spent some time with the Believers there. Eventually, *certain men came down from Judea*. They were members of the “circumcision party,” mentioned earlier, in Acts 11:2, who had challenged Peter about going into the home of an uncircumcised Gentile. Acts 15:24 makes it clear that these men had not been sent by the church of Jerusalem, but that they simply came down to Antioch of their own accord. In Galatians 2:4, Paul made reference to this same Jerusalem Council and describe these men as *false brethren*. They came to Antioch to teach. The Greek tense of the verb “teach” means they began to teach, and they kept at it with determination. The false teachers picked on the brethren, meaning the Gentile believers, because they were not circumcised. To these Gentile believers, they said: *except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*. This was the Judaizers dictum: Believing Gentiles are not saved until they are circumcised. Today certain groups teach another heresy, namely, that believers are not saved until they have been baptized. Both statements are equally wrong. Both involve salvation by works and salvation through ritual.²

² Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts* (San Antonio, TX, Published by Ariel Ministries, 2022), 316.

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If any human works or religious rituals are added to the simple gospel message, it is rendered null and void. A gospel message that includes human works is no gospel at all. Such a message saves no one. Warren Wiersbe states:

God pronounces a solemn anathema on anyone who preaches any other Gospel than the Gospel of the grace of God found in Jesus Christ His Son (Gal 1:1–9). When any religious leader says, “Unless you belong to our group, you cannot be saved!” or, “Unless you participate in our ceremonies and keep our rules, you cannot be saved!” he is adding to the Gospel and denying the finished work of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Galatians to make it clear that salvation is wholly by God’s grace, through faith in Christ, plus nothing!³

The *posttheosoterists* are those who believe they are saved initially by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, but then later adopt a works-system to continue to be saved. I think many in this camp were saved when they heard and responded positively to the simple gospel message (perhaps as a child), placing their faith in Christ alone for salvation, but then later were persuaded to accept a system of legalistic teaching that told them they must do good works to continue to be saved. These would be similar to the Christians Paul wrote to in Galatia, who said, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel” (Gal 1:6). These were believers whom Paul called *brethren* (Gal 1:11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18), declaring they were “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). The Christians in Galatia had trusted in Christ as their Savior; however, some “false

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 461.

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brethren” (Gal 2:4) came among them and taught they must adhere to the Law of Moses to be saved. These were false teachers. According to Fruchtenbaum, “The problem that Paul was dealing with in his epistle to the Galatians concerns a group that has come to be known as ‘the Judaizers.’ These people felt that the Gentiles must obey the Law of Moses in order to be saved (Acts 15:1 and 5).”⁴ Paul, in an effort to correct the false teaching, posed a few simple questions to the Galatian Christians, saying, “This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal 3:2-3). The Christians in Galatia had trusted in Christ as their Savior and had received the Holy Spirit. They were saved. Yet, the legalism of the Judaizers had corrupted the concept of faith alone in Christ alone. Fruchtenbaum notes, “Too many believers think they can and need to add to their salvation. By grace through faith alone does not seem to satisfy. People add the keeping of some of the laws of Moses to their salvation. Others believe their baptism plays a role in it. Again others throw what is commonly known as Lordship salvation into the mix.”⁵ I think posttheosoterism describes many Christians today, who truly trusted Christ as their Savior, but then later were led to believe they needed good works to keep themselves saved. Chafer states, “True salvation is wholly a work of God. It is said to be both a finished work and a gift, and, therefore, it lays no obligation upon the saved one to complete it himself, or to make after payments of service for it.”⁶

⁴ 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), 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Satan* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1909), 111.

Who is the One Who Saves?

I personally trusted Christ as my Savior at age eight; however, shortly afterwards I was taught I needed to keep myself saved by ceasing to sin and also by doing good works. Though I did not lose my salvation (which is impossible), the joy I had when I trusted Christ as my Savior was lost, as I became trapped in a vicious system of trying to keep my salvation by good works. Subsequently, I believed I lost my salvation every time I sinned (which was daily), and felt I needed to come groveling back to God as a failure, and trusting Christ over and over again in order to be saved. Eventually, exhaustion took its toll, and after several years I walked away from God, thinking the Christian life was impossible. It was not until roughly fifteen years later that my assurance of salvation rested in Christ alone, and the joy of my salvation was restored.

Because pride is the default setting of the human heart; it's our natural proclivity to think we can fix the problem of sin and righteousness and either earn God's approval by our own efforts, or at least participate in the effort. Pride must die for salvation to occur, as we come to God with the empty hands of faith, offering nothing, but only receiving the salvation which He offers to us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Human efforts to save are useless. Lewis Chafer notes, "No one under any circumstances could forgive his own sin, impart eternal life to himself, clothe himself in the righteousness of God, or write his name in heaven."⁷

Solatheosoterism is the correct biblical view. This teaches that our spiritual salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, plus nothing more. No good works are required for our salvation before, during, or after we trust

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

Who is the One Who Saves?

in Christ. As stated before, good works should follow salvation (Eph 2:10), but they are never the condition of it. This is the record of Scripture in the OT, as “Salvation belongs to the LORD” (Psa 3:8), and “Our God is a God of salvation” (Psa 68:20 CSB), and “Salvation is from the LORD” (Jon 2:9). In the NT we read about Jesus, and that “He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21), and “He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:13a), 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), and it is “God who 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 1:8b-9). In these verses, salvation is always in one direction, from God to us.

Scripture reveals we are *helpless, ungodly, sinners*, and *enemies* of God (Rom 5:6-10), and prior to our salvation, we were *dead* in our trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). 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. Having paid the full price for our sins, there is nothing that remains for us to pay. Christ paid it all, and our spiritual salvation was completed at the cross, where Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). According to Francis Schaeffer, “Salvation is the whole process that results from the finished work of Jesus Christ as He died in space and time upon the cross.”⁸ And Lewis Chafer notes, “As for revelation, it is the testimony of the Scriptures, without exception, that every feature of man’s salvation from

⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 100.

Who is the One Who Saves?

its inception to the final perfection in heaven is a work of God for man and not a work of man for God.”⁹

No one has the means to redeem his own soul, nor the soul of another. Jesus asked, “what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt 16:26). The answer is nothing! If Jesus had not paid our sin-debt to God, there would be no hope of ever being liberated from spiritual slavery, for “no man can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of his soul is costly, and he should cease trying forever” (Psa 49:7-8). However, Paul writes of the “redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24b), and this speaks to the payment He made on behalf of sinners. The word *redemption* translates the Greek *apolutrosis* (ἀπολύτρωσις) which means to “release from a captive condition.”¹⁰ Redemption refers to the payment of a debt that one gives in order to liberate another from slavery. Jesus declared “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), and the apostle Paul tells us that Jesus “gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:6). When we turn to Christ as our only Savior “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph 1:7; cf. Col 1:13-14). Because Jesus died in our place, He is able to set us free from our spiritual bondage and give us eternal life, but it is only because of His shed blood on the cross that He can do this, for we “were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold...but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:18-19). The blood of Christ is necessary, for “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9:22). And the blood of Christ is the coin

⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 6.

¹⁰ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 117.

Who is the One Who Saves?

of the heavenly realm that paid our sin debt. He paid it all, and there's nothing more for us to pay. Salvation is a gift from God. If we have to pay for it, it ceases to be a gift.

Salvation from What?

Salvation from What?

Most Christians think of salvation in the spiritual sense in which we are saved from the lake of fire (Rev 20:15), and look forward with confidence to our heavenly home (John 14:1-3; 17:24).¹ This is accurate; however, salvation throughout Scripture varies, depending on the suffering or danger caused by sin or sinful people. In the OT, God delivered His people from military attacks (2 Sam 22:3-4; 1 Ch 16:35; Psa 3:6-8), fear (Psa 34:4), troubles (Psa 34:17), and death (Psa 56:13). The same is true in the NT, where God delivered people from physical harm (Matt 8:25-26; 14:30-33; Mark 13:20; John 11:12; Acts 27:20, 31, 44), and diseases (Matt 9:20-22; Luke 6:8-9; Jam 5:15). These records of salvation are wonderful, and God is worthy of all the praise and honor. But Scripture also reveals there were times when God, according to His sovereignty, did not rescue His people physically, but allowed them to suffer, even to the point of a martyr's death. The writer to the Hebrews reveals that some of God's faithful people "were tortured...and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the

¹ For the child of God, our spiritual deliverance from sin is the most important deliverance we can know, as we will never experience God's wrath (John 3:36; Rom 5:9), condemnation (Rom 8:1), or eternal separation from Him (Matt 25:46). After we die, our physical body returns to the dust, and our spirit immediately goes to heaven (Eccl 12:7). Paul wrote, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor 5:1). When we die, we are "absent from the body" and immediately "at home with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8), waiting in heaven for our future resurrection body (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Salvation from What?

ground” (Heb 11:35-38). As believers, they were saved from the greatest danger of all, eternal separation from God in the lake of fire, but not from the pains and hardships of living in a sinful and hostile world where persecution is normal for those who pursue godliness (2 Tim 3:12). Though these faithful saints were not physically rescued from their hardship, God gave them grace (i.e., divine enablement) to cope with whatever suffering they faced, so that they were strengthened and sustained in their inner person. The Lord told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor 12:9), and for all Christians, we are instructed to draw near to God’s “throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Three tenses of salvation

Concerning the Christian’s spiritual deliverance, the NT describes it in three tenses (past, present, and future). Because we have trusted Christ as our Savior, we *have been saved* from the penalty of sin (John 5:24; Rom 8:1, 33-34; Eph 2:8-9), *are being saved* from the power of sin that we might live righteously (Rom 6:11-13; Col 3:5), and *will be saved* from the presence of sin when we leave this world and enter heaven (Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2, 5). These three aspects of our salvation are also referred to as *justification* (declared just before God once for all), *sanctification* (our progressive righteousness over time), and *glorification* (removal of the sin nature after we leave this world). According to Chafer, “In its broadest significance, the doctrine of salvation includes every divine undertaking for the believer from his deliverance out of the lost estate to his final presentation in glory conformed to the image of Christ.”² Charles Ryrie adds:

² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 6.

Salvation from What?

The inclusive sweep of salvation is underscored by observing the three tenses of salvation. (1) The moment one believed he was saved from the condemnation of sin (Eph 2:8; Tit 3:5). (2) That believer is also being saved from the dominion of sin and is being sanctified and preserved (Heb 7:25). (3) And he will be saved from the very presence of sin in heaven forever (Rom 5:9-10).³

The first and third aspects of our salvation (i.e., justification and glorification) are accomplished by God without any human assistance whatsoever. Concerning our justification, Scripture reveals that “God is the one who justifies” (Rom 8:33), and “who justifies the ungodly” (Rom 4:5). This is a work of God alone. No works are required for the one who trusts in Christ as Savior (Rom 4:4-5; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). Concerning our future glorification, Jesus Christ is the One “who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Phil 3:21), and “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him” (1 John 3:2), and that “in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). This means our future heavenly body will have no sin nature. This also is a work of God alone. However, the second aspect of our salvation, our sanctification, requires positive volition on our part. This is obvious by the use of NT verbs that are in the imperative mood (i.e., commands), which require the Christian to obey. As believers, we play a role in our sanctification as we learn and live God’s Word (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18), yield to God the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18; Gal 5:16, 25), walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), and advance to spiritual maturity (Heb 6:1). After being justified (and awaiting glorification), it is possible for the Christian to go negative to God, not learn or live His Word, and remain a carnal Christian (1 Cor 3:1-3). These Christians

³ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 318–319.

Salvation from What?

will be subject to divine discipline (Heb 12:5-11), even to the point of physical death if their sinful lifestyle becomes egregious (1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:16-17), and they will forfeit future rewards (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 John 1:8). Paul, speaking to believers who will be present in heaven at the bema seat of Christ, said, “If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15). The *work* Paul refers to here is the lifetime production of the Christian who fails to live spiritually and advance to maturity. His *work* is the production of the flesh and not the Spirit, and such work will be “burned up” at the bema seat evaluation, and “he will suffer loss” of reward in eternity. Yet, this same Christian “will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15c). This is a worst case scenario for the Christian and one which fails to glorify God and bless others. The best case scenario is seen in the believer who lays hold of his spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph 1:3), daily learns and lives God’s Word (2 Tim 2:15; Jam 1:22), and advances to spiritual maturity (Heb 6:1).

Saved from God’s wrath

Being saved from God’s wrath means we will never experience eternal separation from Him in the lake of fire. John wrote, “The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36 CSB). And Paul said, “having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Rom 5:9). Also, When writing to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul assured them they would be saved “from the wrath to come” (1 Th 1:10). This last verse could refer to the eternal wrath all unbelievers will experience because they have rejected Christ as their Savior, which is the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). However, it could also refer to the wrath of the Tribulation (Rev 6-18), whereby God will judge the world after the rapture of the church (1 Cor 15:51-53; 1 Th 4:13-18).

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Christians living in the dispensation of the church age will be spared from both forms of God's wrath, so there is no need to be concerned with this.

Saved from Satan's domain of darkness

As Christians, we are also saved from “from the dominion of Satan to God” (Act 26:18), and transferred from Satan's “domain of darkness” (Col 1:13a) into “the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:13b). This transference happens at the moment of faith in Christ and is a spiritual reality that is true for all Christians. The kingdom of Christ mentioned here does not refer to the future eschatological kingdom that will come, in which Jesus, a biological descendant of David, is prophesied to rule over the world in righteousness.⁴ Rather, it refers to the current spiritual kingdom where God rules in the hearts of His people. Concerning this passage, Ryrie states, “It refers to the kingdom into which all believers have been placed (Col 1:13), and it is entered by the new birth. The Ruler is Christ; in this concept of the kingdom He rules over believers only; and the relationship exists now.”⁵ And Fruchtenbaum adds, “The Spiritual Kingdom is composed of all believers, and only believers, of all time. The means of entering this Kingdom is by regeneration by the Holy Spirit. In the present age, from Acts two until the Rapture, the

⁴ The Lord focused specifically on David, promising that one of his descendants would rule forever (2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4, 34-37; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-15). This descendant would be a righteous king (Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-9; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-18), and his kingdom will last forever (Dan 2:44; 7:13-14; 1 Cor. 15:24). Jesus is identified as that king (Luke 1:30-33). When Jesus came, He repeatedly offered the earthly kingdom to Israel (Matt 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:5-7), a literal kingdom that was future (Matt 6:10; Luke 19:11; Acts 1:3-6). But they rejected Him and His offer (Matt 11:20; 12:14; Mark 15:12-15; John 19:15); therefore, the earthly kingdom was postponed for a future time (Matt 21:43).

⁵ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 461–462.

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Spiritual Kingdom and the Church are synonymous, but only during the period between Acts two and the Rapture.”⁶

Saved from the coming tribulation

Jesus, when speaking to the church at Philadelphia, said, “Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Rev 3:10). The *hour of testing* here refers to the time of the future Tribulation that follows the rapture of the church. Robert Thomas affirms this, saying, the hour of trial refers to “the future period of trouble just before Christ’s personal return to earth.”⁷ Charles Ryrie adds, “The promise of Revelation 3:10 not only guarantees being kept from the trials of the Tribulation period but being kept from the time period of the Tribulation. The promise is not, “I will keep you from the trials.” It is, “I will also keep you from the *hour of trial*” (NIV).”⁸ Fruchtenbaum states:

In this passage, the Church is promised to be kept from the period of trial that is about to fall upon the whole earth. In the context of the Book of Revelation, it is the Tribulation found in chapters 6–19 that is this period of trial that is to fall upon the whole earth. It is from this period of trial that the Church is to be kept. This verse does not say that the Church will be merely kept safe during the trial, but it will be kept from the very hour of the trial, that is, from the very time of it.⁹

⁶ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah : A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 663.

⁷ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 284.

⁸ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 563–564.

⁹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, 153.

Salvation from What?

Saved from hell

Scripture reveals we are saved from hell. Jesus talked about hell (Matt 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33), saying, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). The word *hell* translates the Greek word *Gehenna* (γέεννα - 12x in the NT), which means “a place of fire.”¹⁰ Biblically, it is a place of eternal torment. Moisés Sylva notes, “Gehenna is elsewhere referred to by such phrases as ‘the blazing furnace’ (Matt 13:42, 50), ‘the eternal fire’ (Matt 25:41), and ‘the fiery lake’ (Rev 19:20 et al.). Gehenna is distinguished from Hades, which evidently houses the souls of the dead before the last judgment; indeed, Hades along with death will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14).”¹¹

Hell is that final place of suffering where all unbelievers go. Speaking to unbelievers at the end of the Tribulation, Jesus said, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41), and of them He said, “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:46). 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). Concerning hell, J. I. Packer wrote:

It is thought of as a place of fire and darkness (Jude 7, 13), of weeping and grinding of teeth (Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), of destruction (2 Th

¹⁰ Moisés Silva, ed., “Gehenna” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 548.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 548.

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1:7–9; 2 Pet 3:7; 1 Th 5:3), and of torment (Rev 20:10; Luke 16:23)—in other words, of total distress and misery. If, as it seems, these terms are symbolic rather than literal (fire and darkness would be mutually exclusive in literal terms), we may be sure that the reality, which is beyond our imagining, exceeds the symbol in dreadfulness. New Testament teaching about hell is meant to appall us and strike us dumb with horror, assuring us that, as heaven will be better than we could dream, so hell will be worse than we can conceive. Such are the issues of eternity, which need now to be realistically faced.¹²

What about those who never hear the gospel?

Someone might say, “What about those who never hear the gospel message about Jesus? Are they condemned to hell?” The Bible reveals that God is “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen 18:25; Psa 58:11), that He “is a righteous judge” (Psa 7:11), and is “righteous in all His ways” (Psa 145:17a). This means God is absolutely fair to everyone, and no one will go to hell who did not choose it.

God has revealed Himself to everyone. In a general sense, He has made Himself known through His creation. Knowledge of God’s existence is clearly revealed through His creation.¹³ David wrote, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.”²

¹² J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 261–262.

¹³ God has also revealed Himself in special ways in the person of Christ (John 1:18; Heb 1:1-3), through the Scriptures (Luke 16:31), and through the lives of His people (Matt 5:16). However, if the unbeliever goes negative at the moment of God consciousness, he/she may never know anything more about God through special revelation, as He is under no obligation to reveal Himself further.

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Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge” (Psa 19:1-2). God is declared and revealed through His creation, much like a painter is revealed through a masterpiece painting. The apostle Paul wrote of God’s wrath which is revealed toward those who reject Him after they come to know about Him through His creation. Paul wrote, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them” (Rom 1:18-19). There’s nothing wrong with God’s revelation of Himself through his creation. The problem lies in people “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18b). Furthermore, God has made Himself known “within them”, which means that each person with normal mental capacity intuitively knows that God exists. In theology, we call this the *sensus divinitatis*, or sense of the divine. Paul continues his line of reasoning, saying, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). Those who reject God after becoming aware of Him, are held morally responsible and are “without excuse” for their choices before a holy and righteous God who will hold them accountable. Robert Mounce states:

Seeing the beauty and complexity of creation carries with it the responsibility of acknowledging the Creator both as powerful and as living above the natural order. Disbelief requires an act of rebellion against common sense. It displays fallen humanity’s fatal bias against God. Although the created order cannot force a person to believe, it does leave the recipient responsible for not believing.¹⁴

¹⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, The New American

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Of those who are negative to God, three times it is written that He “gave them over” to “the lusts of their hearts” (Rom 1:24), and “to degrading passions” (Rom 1:26), and “to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper” (Rom 1:28). Once God permits a person to operate by his sinful passions, that person is given a measure of freedom to live as he wants, but not without consequence, both in time and eternity. Robert Lightner states:

God has given to all a revelation of Himself in both nature and conscience (Psa 19:1-6; Rom 1:20); therefore, all adults are without excuse. Even where the gospel and the name of Jesus have not been heard, God’s revelation in nature and in conscience has been given. Paul described those who rejected God’s general revelation and God’s response to this rejection: He gave them up (Rom 1:24-32). God reveals truth to an open heart. When humans reject the lesser revelation of God in nature and conscience, they are demonstrating their rejection also of God’s greater revelation in Christ ... In places where the gospel has not reached, God holds people responsible for receiving the revelation He has given them. When they receive it, I believe He in sovereign grace sees to it that they hear the good news of salvation in Christ alone so they can believe and be saved. Response to God’s message in nature and conscience does not bring salvation, but it does reveal a willingness to respond to God. It gives evidence of an open and receptive heart. When a person who lives in a land where the gospel is not heard reaches the point when he or she can respond to God’s revelation in nature and in conscience, that person is no longer one who cannot believe. From that

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point on the person becomes responsible for what is done with what is known.¹⁵

If someone is positive and wants to know God personally, then He will make certain that person receives gospel revelation in order to be saved. If the person goes negative and does not want to know Him, then God—who is no bully—will let that person go his own way, but will hold him accountable for his decision. For those who are negative to God and reject Him after coming to know about Him through His creation, that rejection is sufficient to condemn that soul forever. The only heaven they will ever know—if we can call it heaven—is the life they’ll enjoy in this world during their fleeting time on earth. But after they die, all unbelievers will suffer for eternity in hell, forever separated from God, with no hope of their situation changing. Robert W. Yarbrough states:

Jesus spoke repeatedly of ‘the fire of hell’ (Matt 5:22) and ‘eternal fire’ (Matt 18:8). He urged his followers, ‘Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell’ (Luke 12:5). The double-edged nature of Jesus’ ministry is well summarized in John 3:36: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” Those who reject God’s righteousness become targets of his wrath (Rom 1:18, 24, 26, 28; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; Heb 10:26–31; Rev 19:11–21).¹⁶

¹⁵ Robert P. Lightner, *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Kregel Publications, 2000), 60-61.

¹⁶ R. W. Yarbrough, “Atonement,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 390.

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Those who spend eternity in hell are there by choice and not by chance. According to J. I. Packer, “Scripture sees hell as self-chosen; those in hell will realize that they sentenced themselves to it by loving darkness rather than light, choosing not to have their Creator as their Lord, preferring self-indulgent sin to self-denying righteousness, and (if they encountered the gospel) rejecting Jesus rather than coming to Him (John 3:18–21; Rom 1:18, 24, 26, 28, 32; 2:8; 2 Th 2:9–11).”¹⁷

Those who stand before the great white throne for judgement (Rev 20:11) will know the One who is sitting on that throne, and they will know they are there to be judged for their sins. Not a single person will ask, “Who are you?” For they will all know Who He is, and that they are there to face judgment for eternity. All this is avoidable if one will only acknowledge God and respond positively to the gospel of grace and believe in Christ as Savior. One needs only to believe in Christ as Savior to avoid eternity in hell. God has made a way for all to be saved, so if any are not, it’s by their choice and not because there was no divine provision available. When one turns to Christ as Savior, he has forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7) and eternal life (John 3:16; 10:28). These have their names written “in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27). But the opposite is true, for “if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15).

¹⁷ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*, 262–263.

The Work of the Trinity in Salvation

The Work of the Trinity in Salvation

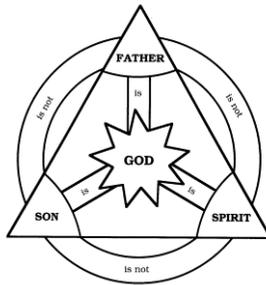
In Christian theology, the Bible reveals there is one God who exists as three distinct Persons within the Trinity (Gen 1:26; 11:6-7; Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2): God the Father (Gal 1:1; Eph 6:23; Phil 2:11), God the Son (John 1:1, 14, 18; 8:58; 20:28; Col 2:9; Heb 1:8), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 2:11-12; 2 Cor 13:14). God is three in Person, but one in essence, sharing the same attributes. The use of the Hebrew numeral *echad* (אֶחָד) reveals, in some contexts, the idea of a complex one, which supports the doctrine of the Trinity (Deut 6:4; cf., Gen 2:24; Ezra 3:1; Ezek 37:17). All three are co-equal, co-infinite, co-eternal, and worthy of all praise and service. According to John Walvoord:

In contrast to the polytheism of the heathen world with its many gods and idols, the Christian faith centers in one God. This God, however, is revealed to be a Trinity, including the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. As such, we distinguish the Father from the Son and both of them from the Holy Spirit...All students of scriptural truth labor to understand the doctrine of the Trinity, but it eludes them because it is beyond anything that they experience in this life...Accordingly, the best procedure is to accept the Bible as true and accept the fact that there is one God who exists in three persons and leave the explanation of this to the life after this.¹

The following ancient illustration of the Trinity by Paul Enns is helpful.

¹ John F. Walvoord, *What We Believe* (Grand Rapids, Mi; Discovery House Publishers, 1990), 38-39.

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2

The three Persons of the God-head are one in essence (Deut 6:4; Isa 43:10; 44:6; 45:5-6), and share the same divine attributes. The attributes of God consist of intrinsic characteristics that are equally representative of the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God's attributes are revealed in Scripture, which means they are objective and can be learned by God's people. Furthermore, the attributes of God explain His actions. And we cannot separate or elevate one attribute above another. The Bible reveals God is: **Living**, which means "He is the living God and the everlasting King" (Jer 10:10), He "has life in Himself" (John 5:26; cf. Psa 42:2; 84:2; Matt 16:16; John 1:4) and is the ultimate source of life. Paul states, "for in Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:28). **Self-existent** (aseity), which means His existence depends on nothing outside of Himself (Ex 3:14). Moses said, "from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psa 90:2). There is no prior cause that brought God into existence, He will never cease to be, and He depends on nothing outside of Himself. **Holy** (Lev 11:44; Psa 99:9; Isa 45:5-19), which means God is morally perfect and separate from all that is sinful. **Spirit** (John 4:24; 2 Cor 3:17), which means the nature of God's being is spirit, not material. **Sovereign** (Psa 115:3; Isa 46:9-11; Dan 4:35; Acts 17:24-28), which means God acts

² Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 200.

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freely as He pleases, always as He pleases, and only as He pleases. **Immutable** (Psa 102:26-27; Mal 3:6), which means God's essential nature does not change. **Eternal** (Deut 33:27; 1 Tim 1:17), which means God has always existed, does exist, and forever will exist. **Infinite** (1 Ki 8:27; Jer 23:24), which means God exists in space and beyond space. **Omniscient** (Psa 139:1-4; Matt 6:31-33), which means God knows all things and is infinite in knowledge. **Omnipresent** (Psa 139:7-10; Jer 23:24), which means He is equally and fully everywhere present. **Omnipotent** (Job 42:2; Isa 40:28), which means God is all-powerful and able to accomplish all He desires. **Righteous** (Psa 11:7; 119:137), which refers to His intrinsic moral perfection, from which He commands all things in heaven and earth, and declares as good that which conforms to His righteousness and as evil that which deviates. **Just** (Psa 9:7-8; 19:9), which refers to the outworking of His righteousness in which He justifies or condemns, blesses or curses, that which does or does not conform to His righteous character. **True** (Jer 10:10; John 17:3), which means He is genuine, in contrast to false idols. This means He truthful (2 Sam 7:28; John 17:17). His knowledge and declarations define reality and help us make sense of what is. **Love** (Jer 31:3; 1 John 4:7-8), which means He is committed to us, desires our best, and acts for our benefit. **Good** (Psa 100:5; 145:9; Nah 1:7; Jam 1:17), which means all He does is good, and that He is the ultimate source of all that is good. **Faithful** (Deut 7:9; Lam 3:21-23), which means He is reliable in all He says and does, always keeping His Word. **Merciful** (Psa 86:15; Tit 3:5), which means He is kind toward us and does not judge us as we deserve. **Gracious** (Psa 111:4; 116:5), which means He treats us better than we deserve.

All three Persons of the Godhead are involved in providing salvation. Our salvation is said to be planned and initiated by God the Father, agreed upon and executed by God the Son, and imparted to each person by God the Holy Spirit. According to Lewis Chafer:

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[It] is essential to recognize that the “salvation [which] is of Jehovah” includes the three Persons of the Godhead as actively engaged in the realization of this stupendous undertaking...In every aspect of saving grace the three Persons are concurring. Even when hanging on the cross, the Son was not alone in His vast achievement. It was God who was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself; the Father was offering His Lamb; and that sacrifice was offered through the eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14).³

Robert Lightner states:

Evangelical Christians, in harmony with the historic orthodox Christian faith, worship God who is one in three and three in one, one in essence and three in person. The entire Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is involved in the salvation of the sinner. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for sinners. He is the Savior! It is customary in evangelical circles to put such emphasis on the second person’s part in our salvation that the roles of the Father and the Spirit are often slighted...Even though it is not always expressed in the same way, evangelicals agree that man’s salvation is the product of the Holy Trinity.⁴

Warren Wiersbe adds:

You will note that all three Persons in the Godhead are involved in our salvation (see also 1 Peter 1:3). As far

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 207.

⁴ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology: A Historical, Biblical, and Contemporary Survey and Review* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995), 190–191.

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as God the Father is concerned, you were saved when He chose you in Christ in eternity past. But that alone did not save you. As far as God the Son is concerned, you were saved when He died for you on the cross. As far as God the Spirit is concerned, you were saved when you yielded to His conviction and received Christ as your Savior. What began in eternity past was fulfilled in time present, and will continue for all eternity!⁵

In what follows, special attention will be given to the specific members of the Trinity and their work in salvation.

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 11.

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God the Father is seen as the initiator, planner, and orchestrator of the salvation of mankind, and this because He is loving, merciful, and kind, and “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4), and is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). Salvation is necessary because of the problem of sin in the human race. All mankind is utterly helpless to bring about a remedy by human effort (Rom 3:10, 23; 5:6-10; Gal 2:16, 21; 3:21-22). Everyone is said to be “darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart” (Eph 4:18), and “dead” in their “trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1; cf., Col 2:13). This refers to spiritual death, which means separation from God. We are trapped in sin and stand guilty before a holy and righteous God and are completely unable to save ourselves. Wiersbe observes:

The unbeliever is not sick; he is dead! He does not need resuscitation; he needs resurrection. All lost sinners are dead, and the only difference between one sinner and another is the state of decay. The lost derelict on skid row may be more decayed outwardly than the unsaved society leader, but both are dead in sin—and one corpse cannot be more dead than another! This means that our world is one vast graveyard, filled with people who are dead while they live (1 Tim 5:6).¹

If God had not made a way for us to be saved, we would be forever lost. Lightner states:

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 18.

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God is the only one who could solve the problem which man's sin presented to Him. After man's fall God the Father began in time the plan of salvation which He devised before time began. This divine plan centered in his divine Son: "He gave His only begotten Son" because He "so loved the world" (John 3:16). "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16). "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9).²

But God intervened. He broke into time and space and displayed His mercy, love, and grace upon mankind. The apostle Paul wrote:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph 2:4-9)

The Father's actions are based on His love for all mankind. He loves because of who He is and not because of the beauty or worth of the object. Scripture reveals that "God

² Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology: A Historical, Biblical, and Contemporary Survey and Review*, 189–190.

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is Love” (1 John 4:8), which means love is part of His nature. God loves because it is His nature to love.

The Father’s eternal plan for salvation

God the Father’s soteriological work is traced back to what He planned before time began. He was motivated to provide for our salvation before we existed. According to Lightner, “We are often led to believe that our salvation began when we made our decision to trust Christ as Savior. The fact is, God was at work on our behalf long before that time.”³ Paul wrote that God the Father “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him” (Eph 1:4). That the Father elected us to salvation is straightforward in this passage, and the doctrine of election will be addressed later in this work. For now, this passage is noted because it speaks of the Father’s salvation-work “before the foundation of the world.” According to Lightner:

God the Father’s work in salvation centers primarily in what he did before time began. With infinite love and compassion he acted on our behalf even before we were born. Paul told the Ephesian Christians that they had been chosen in Christ by the Father before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). To the Roman Christians the same apostle wrote about the Father’s foreknowledge, predestination, and call of them before time (Rom 8:29–30). Peter, writing to saints scattered throughout Asia Minor, described them as “elect” of God the Father (1 Pet 1:2). While evangelicals differ on how these and other such passages are to be understood, they all agree that God the Father initiated the plan of salvation in eternity past.⁴

³ Ibid., 192.

⁴ Ibid., 191.

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God's election starts with His sovereign choice, but also includes the individual choices of those who trust in Christ as Savior. Both are true. Though there is tension at this point—and this because of limited information and limited human capacity to comprehend—both God's sovereignty and human volition must be acknowledged at the same time. Lightner states, "God the Father is sovereign. He must be to be God. Human responsibility is just as biblical as divine sovereignty. Jesus stressed both. Jesus said no one can come to him unless drawn by the Father but he also said none who come to him would be cast out (John 6:37)."⁵ And Paul Enns states, "While there is human responsibility in salvation, there is first a divine side to salvation in which God sovereignly acts to secure the sinner's salvation."⁶ The Christian must be content to live with this tension and not try to force a solution one way or another.

The salvation of mankind, with all its details, was fully comprehended and planned by God the Father from eternity past. It's not as though God was surprised by the fall of Lucifer and mankind. He is eternal, and His plan is eternal. Lightner states, "We must never view salvation as an afterthought or as the only possible way out of a hopeless dilemma on the part of God. The plan of salvation is as eternal as God is. God was not shocked when Satan and then man fell. He is eternal, and his plan is from eternity past to eternity future."⁷

⁵ Ibid., 191.

⁶ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 328.

⁷ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 192.

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God the Father commissioned God the Son

God the Father commissioned God the Son to provide our salvation. God the Son agreed to the Father's mission, came into the world, added humanity to Himself, and executed the Father's plan perfectly. Though Jesus said and did many things during His time on earth, of which many books have been written, His primary mission was to save sinners. Jesus said, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), and "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus lived a sinless life and then sacrificed Himself on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, salvation is offered to all who believe in Him as Savior. Bruce Ware notes, "In eternity, the Father commissioned the Son who then willingly laid aside the glory He had with the Father to come and purchase our pardon and renewal."⁸

God the Father sent the Son to die

It was the Father's will for the Son to go to the cross to die for lost sinners, and the Son willingly went to His death and bore the Father's wrath in our place. This was explained in Isaiah, where the prophet wrote about the Suffering Servant, saying, "But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering" (Isa 53:10a). It is simultaneously true that the Father sent and the Son went. In the Gospel of John, we're told, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal

⁸ Bruce A. Ware, "Tampering with the Trinity: Does the Son Submit to His Father?," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 248.

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life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:16-17). Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29), and “I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). The apostle John wrote, “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 “the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). Walvoord states:

Jesus Christ’s main purpose in coming to the world...was to provide salvation for those who put their trust in Him. Jesus expressed this in Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” In His public ministry Jesus spoke of many truths, and His teachings were so comprehensive that a systematic theology could be written based on what He said and taught. However, this was a background to His dying on the cross for our sins. In this supreme act of dying, He fulfilled His main purpose in becoming incarnate, of being “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).⁹

⁹ John F. Walvoord, *What We Believe*, 73.

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At a point in time, the eternal Son of God added humanity to Himself, simultaneously becoming God and man, Creator and creature, the unique theanthropic person (John 1:1, 14, 18; 8:58; 10:33; 20:28; Col 2:9; Heb 1:8). Jesus is the God-man and exists in hypostatic union, as a single Person with a divine and human nature (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 4:2-3), both natures being distinct and preserved, not mixed or confused, fully God and fully man. The hypostatic union is forever, from conception onward. Jesus was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary (*parthenogenesis* – Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23; Luke 1:26-38), who is the mother of Jesus' humanity (*Christotokos* – bearer of Christ). Some see Mary as the mother of God (*Theotokos* – bearer of God), and though Jesus is God, His divine nature is without origin and eternal. Being the mother of Jesus' humanity honors Mary without elevating her to a place beyond what the Scriptures teach. And Jesus was a Jew, born a son of Abraham, in the line David (Matt 1:1), the promised Messiah (Matt 1:17). Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:40, 52), and lived a perfectly righteous life before God and man. The record of Scripture is that Jesus “knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21), was “without sin” (Heb 4:15), “committed no sin” (1 Pet 2:22), and “in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). In His humanity, Jesus walked in perfect conformity to God the Father's holy character and divine revelation. Cults such as Mormonism and Jehovah's Witness deny the full humanity and deity of Jesus, and for this reason are not within the true Christian community. John Witmer states:

The Scriptures make it clear that Jesus is the union of full deity and perfect, complete humanity. Jesus is the God-Man. The Scriptures are not as clear, however, in delineating the relationship between the divine nature and the human nature in the person of Christ. They are

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clear that it is a hypostatic union, a union of natures to form one person. Jesus is the theanthropic person who feels and thinks and acts as one person. He is not a split personality with His divine and human natures in conflict. In Scripture Jesus never spoke of either His deity or His humanity as separate from Himself; He always spoke and acted as one person.¹

His Deity

The Bible presents Jesus as God. In the OT, the proper name of God is *Yahweh* (יהוה) and is generally translated LORD, using all capital letters. W. E. Vine states, “The Tetragrammaton YHWH appears without its own vowels, and its exact pronunciation is debated (Jehovah, Yehovah, Jahweh, Yahweh).”² When the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT) was written around 250 B.C., the translators chose the Greek word *kurios* (κύριος) as a suitable substitute for the Hebrew name *Yahweh* (יהוה). Though *kurios* (κύριος) is sometimes used in the NT to mean sir (John 4:11; Acts 16:30), and master (Col 3:22), it is also used to refer to the deity of Jesus Christ (compare Isa 40:3 with John 1:23; and Deut 6:16 with Matt 4:7; cf. John 20:28; Rom 10:11-12; Phil 2:11). According to Thiessen, “Although the second person of the trinity often appears in the Old Testament, He is never referred to as Christ. Instead, we have the names Son, Jehovah, and the angel of Jehovah. In Psalm 2:7 Jehovah calls him His Son. More frequently He is called

¹ John Witmer, “The Relationship of God and Man in One Person”, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 339.

² W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., “LORD”, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), 140.

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Jehovah.”³ The NT writers clearly saw Yahweh-God from the OT as referring to Jesus. John Witmer states:

When the disciples addressed Jesus as “Lord,” they were recognizing His deity (e.g., Matt 8:25; 14:30), but it was also a title of respect (e.g., Matt 18:21). In the Old Testament the word Lord also translates the Hebrew word Yahweh, the personal name of God. In many English versions it is printed in capital letters, Lord (e.g., Gen. 2:4). In the Acts of the Apostles and the rest of the New Testament, when Jesus is spoken of or addressed as Lord, His deity clearly is in mind.⁴

Concerning the NT evidence, the apostle John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). And “the Word” which became flesh also existed with the Father “before the world was” (John 17:5). The Jews of Jesus’s day understood His claims to deity, that He “was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18). On another occasion they said to Jesus, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God” (John 10:33). The apostle Thomas, after seeing the resurrected Jesus, said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Paul wrote of Jesus, saying, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9), and elsewhere said that He is “our great God and Savior” (Tit 2:13). And the

³ Henry Clarence Thiessen and Vernon D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 209.

⁴ John A. Witmer, “The Lord Jesus Christ”, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 318.

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writer to the Hebrews said of Jesus, “But of the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever’” (Heb 1:8).

As God, Jesus created the universe, for “He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:2-3). And Paul wrote, “For by Him [Jesus] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col 1:16-17).

As God, Jesus accepted the worship of men and angels. The magi who came to see the newborn Jesus said, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him” (Matt 2:2), and “after coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him” (Matt 2:11a). On three separate occasions the disciples worshipped Jesus. Matthew wrote, “And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’” (Matt 14:33), “And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him” (Matt 28:9), and “When they saw Him, they worshiped Him” (Matt 28:17a). And after Jesus healed a lame man, we are told “he worshiped Him” (John 9:38). And of the angels it is written, “Let all God’s angels worship him” (Heb 1:6). It follows that Jesus is God, since only God can receive worship. Walvoord states, “In any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, the second Person is described as possessing all the attributes of the Godhead, being distinguished as the second Person in contrast

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to the first or third Persons of the Trinity and as the eternal Son in contrast to the Father or the Holy Spirit.”⁵

The Hypostatic Union

The apostle John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). At a point in time, God the Son added to Himself humanity, forever uniting His divine nature with a perfect sinless human nature, becoming the God-man (John 1:1, 14, 18). In the field of systematic theology, this is called the *hypostatic union*. Chafer states, “Though His deity is eternal, the humanity was gained in time. Therefore, the theanthropic Person—destined to be such forever—began with the incarnation.”⁶ God the Son did not indwell a human, but forever added humanity to Himself. According to Paul Enns, “When Christ came, a Person came, not just a nature; He took on an additional nature, a human nature—He did not simply dwell in a human person. The result of the union of the two natures is the theanthropic Person (the God-man).”⁷ Reading through the Gospels, there were times that Jesus operated from His divine nature (Mark 2:5-12; John 8:56-58; 10:30-33), and other times from His human nature (Matt 4:2; Luke 8:22-23; John 19:28). Concerning both natures, Paul Enns wrote:

The two natures of Christ are inseparably united without mixture or loss of separate identity. He remains forever the God-man, fully God and fully

⁵ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago, Ill; Moody Press, 1969), 106.

⁶ Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 383.

⁷ Paul P. Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 227.

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man, two distinct natures in one Person forever. Though Christ sometimes operated in the sphere of His humanity and in other cases in the sphere of His deity, in all cases what He did and what He was could be attributed to His one Person. Even though it is evident that there were two natures in Christ, He is never considered a dual personality. In summarizing the hypostatic union, three facts are noted: (1) Christ has two distinct natures: humanity and deity; (2) there is no mixture or intermingling of the two natures; (3) although He has two natures, Christ is one Person.⁸

Jesus is the God-Man. He is eternal God (Isa 9:6; John 8:56-58), yet He was born of a woman in time and space (Gal 4:4). As God, He is omniscient (Psa 139:1-6), but as a boy, He grew in knowledge (Luke 2:52). As God, He created the universe (Gen 1:1; John 1:3; Col 1:15-16), but as a man, He was subject to weakness (Matt 4:2; John 19:28). Walvoord notes, “When the second Person of the Godhead became incarnate there was immediately introduced the seemingly insuperable problem of uniting God with man and combining an infinite and eternal Person with one that is finite and temporal.”⁹ Concerning the complexity of the union, Lewis Chafer states:

The reality in which undiminished Deity and unfallen humanity united in one Theanthropic Person has no parallel in the universe. It need not be a matter of surprise if from the contemplation of such a Being problems arise which human competency cannot solve; nor should it be a matter of wonder that, since the Bible presents no systematized Christology but

⁸ Ibid., 225.

⁹ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Galaxie Software, 2008), 107.

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rather offers a simple narrative with its attending issues, that the momentous challenge to human thought and investigation which the Christ is, has been the major issue in theological controversy from the beginning to the present time.¹⁰

As finite humans, we struggle to comprehend the union of God and Man; however, it is with certainty that the Bible portrays Him this way (John 1:1, 14; 20:28; Heb 1:8 cf. Luke 1:31-33; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15), and this truth is essential to Christianity. As God, Jesus is worthy of all worship and praise (Luke 24:51-52; John 9:38; 20:28; Heb 1:6). As a perfect sinless Man, He went to the cross and died a substitutionary death in our place (Mark 10:45; Rom 5:6-10; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 1 Pet 3:18), and bore the wrath of God that rightfully belongs to us (Isa 53:1-12), so that we might have the gifts of righteousness and eternal life (John 3:16; 10:28; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9).

The Suffering Servant

It is in the understanding of the suffering and death of Christ that the sinner appreciates God's great love and the price that was paid for our salvation. Christ suffered in our place, bearing the penalty that rightfully belongs to us. Scripture tells us that "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18a). Perhaps no section of Scripture in the Old Testament bears greater testimony to this truth than Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12, in which the prophet reveals the Messiah as the Suffering Servant. Isaiah 53 is mentioned several times in the New Testament as specifically referring to Christ (Matt 8:17; John 12:38; Acts 8:30-35; Rom 10:16; 1 Pet 2:22-25), so that there is no mistake in the minds of the New Testament

¹⁰ Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 387.

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writers that the passage points to Jesus. According to John Stott, “The New Testament writers quote eight specific verses as having been fulfilled in Jesus...eight verses out of the chapter’s twelve are all quite specifically referred to Jesus.”¹¹ And Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes:

It was Isaiah the Prophet who first provided the hope that the day would come when the burden will be lifted. In Isaiah 53, God declared that the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, would be the sacrifice for sin...The point of Isaiah 53 is basically this: The animal sacrifices under the Mosaic Law were intended to be of temporary duration, a temporary measure only. God’s intent was for there to be one final blood sacrifice, and that would be the sacrifice of the Messiah Himself.¹²

In Isaiah 53:10 we observe the Father’s judgment on Christ for our sin, and Christ’s willingness to be judged in our place. Isaiah wrote, “But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand” (Isa 53:10). It was the Father’s will for the Son to go to the cross to die for sinners, but we must also realize that Christ willingly went to His death and bore the Father’s wrath in our place. It is simultaneously true that God sent and Christ went. Jesus was not forced upon the cross, but willingly, in love, surrendered His life and died in our place. Jesus said, “I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:15), and “no one has

¹¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill. Intervarsity Press, 1986), 145.

¹² Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Christology: A Study of Old Testament Prophecy Concerning the First Coming of the Messiah* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1998), 130.

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taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative” (John 10:18). Paul wrote, “Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph 5:2), and “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25), and “the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Christ “offered up Himself” (Heb 7:27), and “offered Himself without blemish to God” (Heb 9:14).

As a result of Jesus bearing the sin of many, Isaiah wrote, “He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand” (Isa 53:10b). When Isaiah said, “He will see His offspring”, it meant that Christ’s death would bear the fruit of spiritual offspring as people turn to Him as Savior and are born again (cf. John 3:3; 1 Pet 1:3, 23). Fruchtenbaum notes, “The Servant’s seed would be those who benefit from His death by spiritual rebirth. The moment they accept for themselves His substitutionary death for their sins, they are born again spiritually by the Holy Spirit. By this spiritual rebirth, they become the Servant’s seed.”¹³ And the phrase, “He will prolong His days” refers to Jesus’ bodily resurrection, never to die again. And the phrase, “the good pleasure of the LORD” most likely speaks of heaven’s wealth that will be known to those whom Christ will justify and who will share in His riches and heavenly estate (John 14:1-3; 1 Pet 1:3-4).

Though Jesus suffered greatly on the cross, His death was infinitely purposeful, as it satisfied the Father’s demands toward our sin, and also justified the many who would trust in Christ as Savior. Isaiah wrote, “As a result of the anguish of

¹³ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Isaiah: Exposition from a Messianic Jewish Perspective* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2021), 577-578.

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His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11). Here is a picture of substitutionary atonement, as the Suffering Servant will “justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11b). Peter also reveals the doctrine of substitution when he states, “Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). It is important to grasp that Christ bore our sin, but this did not make Him a sinner in conduct. On the other hand, we are declared righteous in God’s sight because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us at the moment of salvation, but this does not make us righteous in conduct. God gives us “the gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17) at the moment we trust Christ as our Savior. This is what Paul meant when he stated, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21). Paul understood the doctrine of substitution, that Christ died in the place of sinners and that sinners are declared righteous because of the work of Christ credited to their account. This explains Paul’s desire to “be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil 3:9). Concerning Isaiah 53:11, Edward Young states:

When the servant bears the iniquities of the many and has been punished for the guilt of these iniquities, the act of bearing the iniquities in itself has not changed the character of those whose iniquities are borne. When the iniquities are borne, i.e. when the guilt those iniquities involved has been punished, the servant may declare that the many stand in right relationship with God. Their iniquities will no longer be able to rise up and accuse them, for the guilt of those iniquities has been punished. Thus, they are justified. They are declared to be righteous, for they have received the

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righteousness of the servant and they are received and accepted by God Himself. Of them God says that they no longer have iniquities, but they do have the righteousness of the servant. This can only be a forensic justification.¹⁴

If we had stood at the trials of Jesus, seen His beatings, seen His crucifixion and sat at the foot of the cross, surely we would have wept at the injustice and brutal cruelty of it all. However, the Scripture reveals that it was the will of God that Christ go to the cross and die for sinners (Acts 2:23; 4:28), that His death would be an atoning sacrifice that satisfied every righteous demand of the Father (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2). In the willing death of Christ, we have the Father's righteousness displayed toward our sin as well as His love toward us, the sinner, whom He seeks to save.

There is a purpose to the suffering of Christ. He suffered that we might have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. His substitutionary death propitiated the Father's righteous demand for justice concerning our sin and now we can come to God with the empty hands of faith and receive the free gift of eternal life and be clothed in perfect righteousness. This was accomplished while we were helpless, ungodly, sinners and enemies of God (Rom 5:6-10). God graciously acted toward us to reconcile us to Himself, and this was accomplished through the suffering of Christ.

Jesus' Humility

It is only natural that the subject of Jesus' humility be discussed after examining His position as the Suffering Servant. W. H. Griffith Thomas notes:

¹⁴ Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 358.

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In the Old Testament our Lord is called “the Servant of Jehovah,” and in the New Testament He is described as having taken “the form of a servant.” In order to do the will of God and redeem mankind, it was necessary for Him to humble Himself and become a “Servant,” so that along the pathway of service He might come to that Cross which was at once the exemplification of devoted duty, redeeming grace, and Divine love.¹⁵

Matthew records Jesus’ mental attitude of humility when He said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt 11:29). The word *humble* translates the Greek adjective *tapeinos* (ταπεινός), which denotes being “lowly, undistinguished, of no account.”¹⁶ Jesus’ mental attitude of humility was in contrast with that of the world which regards the virtue of humility in a negative way. Moisés Silva notes, “In the Greek world, with its anthropocentric approach, lowliness is looked on as shameful, to be avoided and overcome by act and thought. In the NT, with its theocentric perspective, the words are used to describe our relationship with God and its effect on how we treat fellow human beings.”¹⁷ For Jesus, being humble meant He was more concerned with doing the Father’s will than that of the world around Him, or even His own will (Luke 22:42). And there was no greater act of humility than Jesus being obedient to the point of death on the cross. Paul wrote that Jesus “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). Wiersbe states, “His

¹⁵ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Christian Life and How to Live It* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1919), 59–60.

¹⁶ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 989.

¹⁷ Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 452.

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was not the death of a martyr but the death of a Savior. He willingly laid down His life for the sins of the world.”¹⁸ Homer Kent notes, “He was so committed to the Father’s plan that he obeyed it even as far as death (Heb 5:8). Nor was this all, for it was no ordinary death, but the disgraceful death by crucifixion, a death not allowed for Roman citizens, and to Jews indicative of the curse of God (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13).”¹⁹ And Earl Radmacher comments:

Jesus came to the earth with the identity of a man. Here the word *appearance* points to the external characteristics of Jesus: He had the bearing, actions, and manners of a man. He humbled Himself: Jesus willingly took the role of a servant; no one forced Him to do it. Obedient: Although He never sinned and did not deserve to die, He chose to die so that the sins of the world could be charged to His account. Subsequently He could credit His righteousness to the account of all who believe in Him (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4).²⁰

As stated before, Jesus was not forced to go to the cross, but willingly went to the cross and bore our sin (Isa 53:4-11; John 10:17-18; 1 Pet 2:24). As God, He could have avoided the cross altogether, or even stepped down from the cross if He’d wanted. Jesus died on a cross to accomplish the Father’s will. To be an atoning sacrifice for our sins, so that we could receive forgiveness and eternal life and enjoy heaven forever with Him. His being humble to the point of death was

¹⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2, 75.

¹⁹ Homer A. Kent Jr., “Philippians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 124.

²⁰ Earl D. Radmacher, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 1550–1551.

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for our wellbeing. He died for us, “the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). Walvoord notes:

No one else has ever come from infinite heights of glory to such a shameful death. If there had been a better way or another way by which the sin of the whole world could have been taken away, surely God would not have required His beloved Son to submit to such a death. This was the only way. There had to be a perfect sacrifice, an atonement of infinite value. This could be accomplished only by a person who was both God and man, who was without sin and yet was truly a man representing the human race. No other could take the place of Christ, no act of devotion, however unselfish, no act of ordinary man, however courageous, for sin. As we contemplate the mind of Christ which made Him willing to die on the cross, we must realize that if Christ had not died men would still be in their sins with a hopeless eternity and facing just as certain a judgment as that which is the lot of the lost angels who know nothing of salvation.²¹

Jesus’ Sinless Life

The record of Scripture is that 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). But why was the sinless humanity of Jesus necessary? The biblical teaching is that 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). Because of our fallen sinful state, we are completely helpless to solve the sin problem and save ourselves (Rom 5:6-10; Eph 2:1-3), and

²¹ John F. Walvoord, *To Live Is Christ*, 45.

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good works have no saving merit before God (Isa 64:6; Rom 4:4-5; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). Being completely sinless, Jesus was qualified to go the cross as “a lamb unblemished and spotless” (1 Pet 1:19) and die a substitutionary death in our place, “the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). Charles Lee Feinberg states, “Though tempted in all points as we are, He was nevertheless without sin (Heb 4:15); indeed, we are told, He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners (Heb 7:26). In short, the combined testimony of Scripture reveals that in Him is no sin (1 John 3:5).”²² According to R. B. Thieme Jr.:

As true humanity living on earth, Christ was free from all three categories of human sinfulness: the sin nature, Adam’s original sin, and personal sins. The first two categories were eliminated from our Lord’s life through the virgin birth, but personal sin remained an issue throughout the Incarnation. Scripture confirms that our Lord can “sympathize with our weaknesses,” because He “has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). The temptation to personal sin did not come from within, because the humanity of Christ had no inherent sin nature. He did, however, receive temptation from outside His person—even being tempted by Satan himself...By constantly relying on the provisions of the spiritual life (the same provisions available to us), Jesus Christ was able to resist every temptation and remain perfect (1 John 3:3, 5).²³

²² Charles Lee Feinberg, “The Hypostatic Union,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 92 (1935): 423.

²³ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Impeccability of Christ”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 135.

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Sinners need salvation, but cannot save themselves, nor can they save another. All are trapped in sin and utterly helpless to change their condition. But God the Son did what we cannot do for ourselves. He obeyed the Father and stepped into time and space, taking true and sinless humanity to Himself, and living a perfect life before the Father. Then, at a point in time, He surrendered Himself to the cross and died a penal substitutionary death on behalf of all humanity, bearing the wrath of God in their place. Then He was placed in a grave and rose again to life on the third day, never to die again. The benefits of the cross are applied to those who come to Jesus with the empty hands of faith, believing He died for them, was buried, and raised again on the third day. When they place their faith in Him as Savior, they have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This is given freely by grace. R. 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.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid., “Salvation”, 232.

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Jesus' Willingness to Die

Jesus was not forced to go to the cross, but willingly went and bore our sin (Isa 53:4-11; John 10:17-18; 1 Pet 2:24). Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11), and "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative" (John 10:18a). It was the will of the Father for Jesus to die a penal substitutionary death, and Jesus willingly accomplished it. Jesus said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me" (Heb 10:5). And once in hypostatic union, Jesus said, "Behold, I have come to do your will" (Heb 10:9). It was necessary for Jesus to be fully human and free from sin to be the atoning sacrifice. Thomas Constable states, "Jesus willingly offered Himself; no human took His life from Him. However, He offered Himself in obedience to the Father's will."²⁵ According to Leon Morris, "The Lord's death does not take place as the result of misadventure or the might of his foes or the like. No one takes his life from him. Far from this being the case, he himself lays it down, and does so completely of his own volition."²⁶ William MacDonald adds:

No one could take the Lord's life from Him. He is God, and is thus greater than all the murderous plots of His creatures. He had power in Himself to lay down His life, and He also had power to take it again. But did not men kill the Lord Jesus? They did. This is clearly stated in Acts 2:23 and in 1 Thessalonians 2:15. The Lord Jesus allowed them to do it, and this was an

²⁵ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Jn 10:18.

²⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 456.

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exhibition of His power to lay down His life. Furthermore, He “gave up His Spirit” (John 19:30) as an act of His own strength and will.²⁷

Jesus’ Substitutionary Atonement

Atonement is a very important concept in the Bible. In the OT, the word *atonement* translates the Hebrew verb *kaphar* (כָּפַר) which means to “cover over, pacify, propitiate, [or] atone for sin.”²⁸ Theologically, it means “to bring together in mutual agreement, with the added idea, in theology, of reconciliation through the vicarious suffering of one on behalf of another.”²⁹ The animal sacrificial system—which was part of the Mosaic Law—taught that sin must be atoned for. The idea of substitution was clearly taught as the sinner laid his hands on the animal that died in his place (Lev 4:15, 24; 16:21). The innocent animal paid the price of death on behalf of the guilty sinner.

The animal sacrificial system under the Mosaic Law taught that God is holy, man is sinful, and that God was willing to judge an innocent creature as a substitute in place of the sinner. The animal that shed its blood gave up its life in place of the one who had offended God, and it was only through the shed blood that atonement was made. A life for a life. The animal sacrificial system under the Mosaic Law was highly symbolic, temporary, and pointed forward to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The Levitical priests would

²⁷ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, 1526.

²⁸ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers 1979), 497.

²⁹ G. W. Bromiley, “Atone; Atonement,” ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 352.

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regularly perform their temple sacrifices on behalf of the people to God, but being a symbolic system, the animal sacrifices could never “make perfect those who draw near” to Him, for the simple reason that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:1, 4). For nearly fourteen centuries the temple priests kept “offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Heb 10:11), until finally Christ “offered one sacrifice for sins for all time” (Heb 10:12), and through that one offering “perfected for all time those who are sanctified” by it (Heb 10:14). What the Mosaic Law could never accomplish through the sacrifice of symbols, Christ did once and for all time through His substitutionary death on the cross when he died in the place of sinners.

Jesus’ death on the cross was a satisfactory sacrifice to God which completely paid the price for our sin. We owed a debt to God that we could never pay, and Jesus paid that debt in full when He died on the cross and bore the punishment that rightfully belonged to us. In Romans 3:25 Paul used the Greek word *hilasterion* (ἱλαστήριον)—translated *propitiation*—to show that Jesus’ shed blood completely satisfied God’s righteous demands toward our sin, with the result that there is nothing more for the sinner to pay to God. Jesus paid our sin-debt in full. The Apostle John tells us “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2; cf., 1 John 4:10). Jesus’ death on the cross forever satisfied God’s righteous demands toward the sins of everyone for all time! God has “canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:14). Regarding Christ’s death, J. Dwight Pentecost states:

You can be adjusted to God’s standard, because God made Christ to become sin for us. The One who knew no sin, the One in whose lips had never been found

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guile, took upon Himself our sin in order that He might bear our sins to the cross and offer Himself as an acceptable substitute to God for us—on our behalf, in our place. And when Jesus Christ identified Himself with sinners and went to the cross on their behalf and in their place, He was making possible the doctrine of reconciliation. He was making it possible for God to conform the world to Himself, to adjust the world to His standard so that sinners in the world might find salvation because “Jesus paid it all.” You can be adjusted to God, to God’s standard, through Christ, by His death, by His cross, by His blood, and by His identification with sinners.³⁰

In the NT, the idea of substitution is observed in the use of two Greek prepositions. The first is the preposition *hyper* (ὑπὲρ), translated “for,” which means “in behalf of, for the sake of someone.”³¹ The idea of Jesus dying as a substitute in the place of sinners is seen in Romans 5:8 where Paul wrote, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The second preposition that denotes substitution is *anti* (ἀντί), also translated “for,” which expresses the idea “that one person or thing is, or is to be, replaced by another, instead of, in place of.”³² The preposition *anti* (ἀντί) is seen in Jesus’ statement, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). According to Robert Lightner:

³⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mi., Kregel Publications, 1965), 89.

³¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1030.

³² *Ibid.*, 87.

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The biblical view of the Savior's death is that he died to satisfy the demands of the offended righteousness of God. The Savior died in the sinner's place. This is an essential, indispensable truth in evangelicalism. It is true that Christ died for the sinner's benefit, but that does not fully describe the nature and purpose of his finished work. He gave his life in the sinner's place. He died as the sinner's substitute. The strongest expression of Christ's substitutionary death is given with the Greek preposition *anti*, translated "for." Christ himself used this word when he said, "even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom *for* many" (Matt 20:28; cf. Matt 26:28; 1 Tim 2:6). Christ died in the sinner's place. He died instead of the condemned.³³

Jesus' atonement for sins is the basis for reconciliation, because God has judged our sins in the Person of Christ who died on the cross in our place. The death of Christ has forever satisfied God's righteous demands for our sin and it is on this basis that He can accept sinners into heaven. The blood of Christ is the only coin in the heavenly realm that God accepts as payment for our sin-debt, and Christ paid our sin debt in full. That's good news!

Because Jesus' death satisfied God's righteousness demands for sin, the sinner can approach God who welcomes him without reservation. God has cleared the way for sinners to come to Him for a new relationship, and this is based completely on the substitutionary work of Christ. God has done everything to reconcile humanity to Himself. The debt that was owed to God was paid in full by the blood of Christ.

³³ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 194.

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Jesus' Resurrection

Jesus' resurrection is an essential element in soteriology. In fact, every writer of the NT assumes that Jesus was resurrected from the grave and treat it as an event that took place in time and space. Paul wrote that Jesus "was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:4), that He was "the first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Cor 15:20), and that "having been raised from the dead, is never to die again" (Rom 6:9). After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to numerous persons over a period of forty days (Acts 1:3), namely, Mary Magdalene and other women (Matt 28:1-10; John 20:10-18), two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32), the disciples without Thomas (John 20:19-25), the disciples with Thomas (John 20:26-29), the disciples by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23), Peter, James, and more than 500 brethren at one time (1 Cor 15:5-7). After these appearances, Jesus ascended bodily into heaven (Acts 1:4-11). It is recorded that God the Father "raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:20). Ralph Earle notes the importance of Jesus' resurrection as follows:

Without the Resurrection the Crucifixion would have been in vain. It was the Resurrection which validated the atoning death of Jesus and gave it value. Paul describes it strikingly this way: "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom 4:25). The resurrection of Jesus proved that his sacrifice for sins had been accepted. The whole redemptive scheme would have fallen apart without it. For by his resurrection Jesus Christ became the first fruits of a new race, a new humanity.³⁴

³⁴ Ralph Earle, "The Person of Christ: Death, Resurrection, Ascension," in *Basics of the Faith: An Evangelical Introduction to*

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Charles Ryrie adds:

In the classic passage, 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, Christ’s death and resurrection are said to be “of first importance.” The Gospel is based on two essential facts: a Savior died and He lives. The burial proves the reality of His death. He did not merely faint only to be revived later. He died. The list of witnesses proves the reality of His resurrection. He died and was buried; He rose and was seen. Paul wrote of that same twofold emphasis in Romans 4:25: He was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification. Without the Resurrection there is no Gospel...If Christ did not rise then our witness is false, our faith is without meaningful content, and our prospects for the future are hopeless (1 Cor 15:13–19). If Christ is not risen then believers who have died would be dead in the absolute sense without any hope of resurrection. And we who live could only be pitied for being deluded into thinking there is a future resurrection for them.³⁵

The resurrection of Jesus is an essential element of the Christian gospel. Paul wrote, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you” (1 Cor 15:1). And the content of the gospel Paul preached was “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). Believing the gospel message means accepting this information as true, and then trusting in Christ as one’s Savior. According to R.B. Thieme Jr., “First Corinthians 15:3-4 defines the boundaries of the Gospel,

Christian Doctrine, ed. Carl F. H. Henry, Best of Christianity Today (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 184.

³⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 308.

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beginning with the work of Christ and ending with His resurrection...Any Gospel message that strays from the cross or denies Jesus Christ's resurrection from physical death is inaccurate and out of bounds."³⁶

Amazingly, there were some at the church in Corinth who taught "that there is no resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor 15:12). Paul addressed this issue head on, saying, "if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is useless...For if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins." (1 Cor 15:13-14, 17). The clear teaching of Scripture is that "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Cor 15:20), and being "raised from the dead, is never to die again" (Rom 6:9). By His resurrection, Jesus proved that He overcame sin and death. Robert Mounce states:

Having been raised from the dead, Christ cannot die again. His resurrection was unlike that of Lazarus, who had to meet death once again. But Christ's resurrection broke forever the tyranny of death. That cruel master can no longer exercise any power over him. The cross was sin's final move; the resurrection was God's checkmate. The game is over. Sin is forever in defeat. Christ the victor died to sin "once for all" and lives now in unbroken fellowship with God.³⁷

³⁶ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. "Gospel", *Thieme's Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 113

³⁷ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 152.

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Jesus' Ascension and Session

After Jesus' resurrection, he appeared to many on several occasions. His final appearance was to His apostles. Luke wrote, "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). And in Acts we're told, "He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). It's important to note that Jesus ascended bodily into heaven, and that He will return the same way. Jesus' ascension into heaven was the beginning of His session at the right hand of God. Concerning Jesus's session, R. B. Thieme Jr. notes, "At His session, the humanity of Christ was 'crowned with glory and honor' and exalted to a position far higher than the angels (Heb 2:9). The Father put all powers and authorities in subjection to His Son and confirmed the ultimate subjugation of all who oppose Him."³⁸ Jesus is, right now, "at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him" (1 Pet 3:22; cf., Eph 1:20), and He was "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb 2:9), and holds the title of "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16). According to Werner Foerster, "Session at the right hand of God means joint rule. It thus implies divine dignity, as does the very fact of sitting in God's presence."³⁹ And Ryrie notes, "By His resurrection and ascension our Lord was positioned in the place of honor at the right hand of the Father to be Head over the church, His body (Eph 1:20-23)."⁴⁰ Walvoord notes:

³⁸ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. "Session of Jesus Christ", *Thieme's Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 238.

³⁹ Werner Foerster, "Κύριος", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 1089.

⁴⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 313.

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In the ascension of the incarnate Christ to heaven, not only was the divine nature restored to its previous place of infinite glory, but the human nature was also exalted. It is now as the God-Man that He is at the right hand of God the Father. This demonstrates that infinite glory and humanity are compatible as illustrated in the person of Christ and assures the saint that though he is a sinner saved by grace he may anticipate the glory of God in eternity.⁴¹

Ryrie states, “The Ascension marked the end of the period of Christ’s humiliation and His entrance into the state of exaltation... The Ascension having taken place, Christ then was ready to begin other ministries in behalf of His own and of the world.”⁴² Lewis Chafer notes seven aspects of Jesus’ current ministry in heaven.

Seven aspects of His present ministry are to be recognized, namely: (1) exercise of universal authority. He said of Himself, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt 28:18); (2) Headship over all things to the Church (Eph 1:22–23); (3) bestowment and direction of the exercise of gifts (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:4–31; Eph 4:7–11); (4) intercession, in which ministry Christ contemplates the weakness and immaturity of His own who are in the world (Psa 23:1; Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25); (5) advocacy, by which ministry He appears in defense of His own before the Father’s throne when they sin (Rom 8:34; Heb 9:24; 1 John 2:1); (6) building of the place He has gone to prepare (John 14:1-3); and (7) “expecting” or waiting until the moment when by the Father’s decree the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of

⁴¹ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, 121–122.

⁴² Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 312.

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the Messiah—not by human agencies but by the resistless, crushing power of the returning King (Heb 10:13).⁴³

Jesus' Return for His Saints

The eschatological subject of the Rapture of the church is briefly presented here under the study of Soteriology because it is regarded as a form of deliverance. When Messiah returns at the end of the church age, He will deliver His church from an evil world and a coming judgment that will last for seven years. A distinction is here drawn between Jesus coming *for* His saints at the Rapture, and Jesus coming *with* His saints at His Second Coming (Dan 7:13-14; Matt 19:28; 25:31; Rev 19:11-21). Jesus is now in heaven preparing a place for believers to be with Him there (John 14:1-3). Paul revealed Jesus will return for His church and that all Christians will be “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air (1 Th 4:13-18).

The doctrine of the Rapture was first presented by the Lord Jesus when He provided new information to His apostles on the night before His crucifixion. After speaking of His soon departure (John 13:33), Jesus comforted them, saying, “Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3). The place where Jesus was going was heaven. The purpose of His going was to prepare a place for them. And, at some unspecified time, Jesus promised He would come again to receive them to Himself, that they may be with Him.

⁴³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 7, 82.

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Paul described this as a time when “we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:51-53). And, when writing to the church at Thessalonica, Paul explained, “the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Th 4:16b-17). The meaning of *caught up* (ἀρπάζω) is “to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, snatch/take away.”⁴⁴ John Walvoord states, “The important point is that the verse says Christ will come for believers and take them from the earth to heaven, where they will be in His presence till they return with Him to the earth to reign. The Rapture will mean that all believers “will be with the Lord forever,” enjoying Him and His presence for all eternity.”⁴⁵

As Christians, we are “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Tit 2:13). This Rapture is immanent, meaning it may occur at any time and without prior notice. All Christians who are alive at the time of the Rapture will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, will go with Him to heaven, and be saved from the wrath to be poured out during the seven-year Tribulation. Our future is not one of judgment; rather, we are assured we will be saved from God’s future wrath, both in time and eternity (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rev 3:10).

⁴⁴ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 134.

⁴⁵ John Walvoord, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 1265.

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Jesus' Return with His Saints

When Jesus returns to the earth after the time of the seven year Tribulation, He will establish His kingdom on earth.⁴⁶ This is a time when humanity will be saved from the tyranny of Satan who currently rules over the earth.⁴⁷ At His Second Coming, it is written, “And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses” (Rev 19:14). Concerning this passage, Radmacher states, “The armies in heaven may be angelic hosts (Rev 5:11; Matt 26:53), but Revelation 17:14 speaks of those with the Lord at His coming as being ‘called, chosen, and faithful,’ all terms for believers (Rom 1:7; Eph 1:1; 1 Pet 2:9).”⁴⁸ Wiersbe adds, “Certainly the angels are a part of this army (Matt 25:31; 2 Th 1:7); but so are the saints (1 Th 3:13; 2 Th 1:10).”⁴⁹ Norman Geisler states:

Before the Tribulation, Christ comes *for* His bride (1 Th 4:16–17; John 14:3); then, at the end of the

⁴⁶ The subject of Messiah’s earthly kingdom is found throughout the OT (Dan 2:44; 7:13-14; 2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4, 34-37; Isa 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6) and the NT (Matt 6:9-10; 19:28; 25:31; Luke 1:31-33; Rev 19:11-16; Rev 20:4-6).

⁴⁷ Three times Jesus referred to Satan as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Other passages of Scripture call Satan “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4), and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), informing us “that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Satan rules as a tyrant who has “weakened the nations” (Isa 14:12), and currently “deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9). Satan continues to attack God’s people today (1 Pet 5:8), practices deception (2 Cor 11:13-15), and has well developed strategies of warfare (Eph 6:10-12). Furthermore, humanity is living in an “evil age” (Gal 1:4), under “the dominion of Satan” (Acts 26:18), whose sphere of influence is called “the domain of darkness” (Col 1:13).

⁴⁸ Earl D. Radmacher, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 1762.

⁴⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2, 618.

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Tribulation, He will return *with* all His saints. Jude wrote, “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones” (Jude 1:14; cf., Matt 24:29–31). He cannot come *with* them until He has first come *for* them; we have identified the time interval between these events as seven years.⁵⁰

H. Wayne House comments:

It is important to remember that when we say “the second coming” of Christ, we are not talking about the rapture that occurs prior to the second coming. The rapture is most clearly presented in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. It is characterized in the Bible as a “translation coming” (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Th 4:15–17) in which Christ comes for His church. The second advent is Christ returning with His saints, descending from heaven to establish His earthly kingdom (Zech 14:4–5; Matt 24:27–31).⁵¹

At His Second Coming, Jesus will put down all rebellion, both human and satanic. The two main leaders of the world, the Antichrist and his false prophet, will be defeated and “thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone” (Rev 19:20). Furthermore, those people who followed Antichrist “were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh” (Rev 19:21). Afterwards, the Lord will send one of His angels to arrest and imprison Satan (Rev 20:1-3). John wrote about this angel, saying, “And he laid hold

⁵⁰ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 618–619.

⁵¹ H. Wayne House and Timothy J. Demy, *Answers to Common Questions about Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011), 75–76.

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of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev 20:2-3a). This will be a time of global deliverance from evil as Messiah reigns over all the earth in perfect righteousness.

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The Deity and Personality of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God and He displays the characteristics of personhood. When referring to the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-14), Jesus used the demonstrative masculine pronoun “He” (*ekeinos* ἐκεῖνος), which indicates personhood. In addition, Scripture reveals the Holy Spirit can be lied to. In the book of Acts, the apostle Peter accused Ananias of lying “to the Holy Spirit” (Acts 5:3). In the very next verse Peter said, “You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:4). One cannot lie to a force (such as electricity), but only to a person. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Eph 4:30), quenched (1 Th 5:19), resisted (Acts 7:51), and blasphemed (Matt 12:31). These activities can be done only to a person. The Bible reveals the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation (Gen 1:2), brought about the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:35), guided the writers of Scripture (2 Sam 23:2; 2 Pet 1:21), convicts unbelievers of the sin of unbelief (John 16:8-11), regenerates believers at the moment of faith in Jesus (John 3:6; 6:63), baptizes them into union with Christ (1 Cor 12:13), indwells (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), seals (Eph 1:13; 4:30), gives spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7-11), glorifies Jesus (John 16:13-15), empowers (Eph 5:18), sustains the spiritual walk (Gal 5:16-18, 25), loves Christians (Rom 15:30), prays for them (Rom 8:26-27), comforts them (John 14:26), teaches and guides (John 14:26; 16:13-15), and makes Scripture understandable (1 Cor 2:11-13). According to Geisler:

All the elements of personhood are attributed to the Holy Spirit in Scripture. He has a mind (John 14:26): “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you.” He has will (1 Cor 12:11): “All these are the work of one and the

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same spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines”; and He has feeling (Eph 4:30): “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”¹

Prior to the coming of God the Son into the world (John 1:1, 14), the Holy Spirit had been active in the lives of saints such as Artisans (Ex 31:1-5), Judges (Num 11:25-29; Judg 3:9-10), Prophets (Ezek 2:2), and Kings (1 Sam 10:6; 16:13). In the OT, the Spirit did not indwell every believer, and could be removed as an act of divine discipline (1 Sam 16:14-16; Psa 51:11). The loss of the Spirit in the life of an OT saint did not mean forfeiture of salvation; rather, it meant loss of empowerment to a task. This would be especially onerous to a king, like Saul (1 Sam 16:14-16), because it meant he would continue to serve as king, but would lack the divine enablement necessary to perform the work. Thus, the king would have nothing more to rely upon than his human resources, and this would prove woefully inadequate, considering the huge responsibility of leadership. Without the enabling power of God the Holy Spirit, the king would be vulnerable to great anxiety and eventual collapse. David feared this discipline when he’d sinned against the Lord (Psa 51:11).²

In the dispensation of the church age (starting in Acts 2), God the Holy Spirit plays a key role in the salvation of the lost. Though we are not given all the particulars, and there is some mystery as to the details of how He works, it is still clear from the NT that He has a special ministry related to the

¹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Two: God, Creation*, 287–288.

² The OT is basically silent concerning the role the Holy Spirit played in the salvation of OT saints; however, it is assumed He was active, albeit quietly in the background.

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salvation of the lost, and apart from His work, none can be saved. The zealous evangelist who seeks to win to the souls of the lost may, from a heart of compassion, employ every passage of Scripture related to salvation along with every compelling line of good reason and yet, in the end, fail to bring one person to Christ. Chafer speaks to this as follows:

Every soul-winner becomes aware, sooner or later, of the fact that the vast company of unsaved people do not realize the seriousness of their lost estate; nor do they become alarmed even when the most direct warning and appeal is given to them. They may be normally intelligent and keen to comprehend any opportunity for personal advancement in material or intellectual things; yet there is over them a spell of indifference and neglect toward the things that would secure for them any right relation to God. All the provisions of grace with the present and future blessedness of the redeemed are listened to by these people without a reasonable response. They are, perhaps, sympathetic, warm-hearted and kind; they are full of tenderness toward all human suffering and need; but their sinfulness before God and their imperative need of a Savior are strangely neglected. They lie down to sleep without fear and awaken to a life that is free from thought or obligation toward God. The faithful minister soon learns, to his sorrow, that his most careful presentation of truth and earnest appeal produces no effect upon them, and the question naturally arises: “How, then, can these people be reached with the Gospel?”³

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *True Evangelism* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1911), 71–72.

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In addition to the blinding effects of sin resident in every human heart is the veiling work of Satan. Paul wrote, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:3-4). The blinding work of Satan in the minds of the lost, coupled with negative volition (i.e., the unbelieving heart), creates a double wall of resistance that cannot be penetrated by human effort. Attempts to breach these walls, or to break them down by human effort alone, has resulted in great frustration. The lost can only be saved when the Spirit performs His work in their hearts and they respond positively and freely to the gospel of grace. Lewis Chafer states, “It is as definitely contended that, apart from this divine influence, no unregenerate person will ever turn to God. From this it will be seen that, next to the accurate and faithful presentation of the gospel of saving grace, no truth is more determining respecting all forms of evangelism than this.”⁴ The Spirit must do His work in the hearts of the unsaved, and the lost must respond to His work before salvation can occur. Then, and only then, will the evangelist be effective in winning souls, and this when he presents the gospel of grace clearly to the willing heart.

The Spirit’s Sustaining Ministry

Prior to the present work of the Spirit in the world today, He was working in the life of Jesus to sustain His humanity until He completed the Father’s mission (Matt 3:16; 4:1; 12:28; Luke 4:14, 18). Naturally, His work with God the Son to complete our salvation preceded His work of applying that salvation to all who turn to Christ in simple faith, believing the gospel, and trusting in Christ to save.

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 210.

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The coming of God the Son into the world marked a shift in human history (John 1:1, 14, 18), and God the Holy Spirit was involved in His human conception (Luke 1:26-35), sustained Him during His time of ministry (Luke 4:14; cf. Matt 12:28; Mark 1:10-12), and upheld Him during His time of death on the cross (Heb 9:14). John Walvoord notes:

There is implication that the whole process of the incarnation leading to the cross was related to the work of the Holy Spirit. As Christ was sustained in life, so also in death the Holy Spirit sustained Christ. In the difficult hours of Gethsemane and all the decisive moments leading to the cross, the Holy Spirit faithfully ministered to Christ.⁵

God the Holy Spirit was helping Christ fulfill the Father's mission of going to the cross and dying in the place of sinners. Of Jesus' time on the cross, the writer of Hebrews states, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb 9:14).⁶ William Lane notes, "The fact that his offering was made 'through the eternal Spirit,' implies that he had been divinely empowered and sustained in his office."⁷ God the Holy Spirit helped to sustain the humanity of Jesus in hypostatic union, which enabled Him to complete the Father's mission of going to the cross and dying as a substitute for lost humanity. According to Walvoord:

⁵ John F. Walvoord, "The Holy Spirit in Relation to the Person and Work of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 98 (1941): 52.

⁶ There is some debate about whether the "the eternal Spirit" refers to Jesus' Spirit (Fruchtenbaum) or the Holy Spirit (Radmacher).

⁷ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, vol. 47B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1991), 240.

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The work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the sufferings of Christ on the cross consisted, then, in sustaining the human nature in its love of God, in submission to the will of God and obedience to His commands, and in encouraging and strengthening Christ in the path of duty which led to the cross. In it all the ministry was to the human nature, and through it to the person of Christ. The inquiring mind must ever confess that this truth is infinite and beyond our complete comprehension.⁸

The Spirit's Convicting Ministry to the World

In the NT, God the Holy Spirit took on a new ministry after Jesus returned to heaven (John 16:7-15; cf., Acts 1:6-8; 2:1-4; 15:7-9). Part of His ministry is to believers, and part is to unbelievers. Concerning the Spirit's ministry to believers, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7). The *Helper* is the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus *will send* (future tense of the Greek verb *pempo*) to believers. The Spirit's work in Christians would be multifaceted and would relate to their sanctification and godly influence in a fallen world. After Pentecost (Acts 2), God the Holy Spirit would work in and through His church to other Christians, to help with their sanctification, and to unbelievers, to share the gospel of grace that they might be saved. Wiersbe states:

The Holy Spirit does not minister in a vacuum. Just as the Son of God had to have a body in order to do His work on earth, so the Spirit of God needs a body to accomplish His ministries; and that body is the church.

⁸ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 101.

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Our bodies are His tools and temples, and He wants to use us to glorify Christ and to witness to a lost world.⁹

This is very encouraging, because Christians know that God the Holy Spirit is working through them to help lead the lost to Christ. But there is also a special work the Holy Spirit is doing in the hearts of unbelievers to help prepare them to turn to Christ as Savior. Concerning this special work, Jesus said, “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). Jesus’ statement about the Holy Spirit is in the future tense (*He will convict*), which implies the Spirit’s special ministry was not active at the time Jesus uttered His statement. This special convicting ministry would be inaugurated on the day of Pentecost. The word *convict* translates the Greek word *elegcho* (ἐλέγγω), which means, “to bring a person to the point of recognizing wrongdoing, convict, [or] convince someone of something.”¹⁰ Jesus said the Spirit’s convincing work would fall into three areas: 1) “concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me” (John 16:9), 2) “concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me” (John 16:10), and 3) “concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged” (John 16:11). Let’s look at these in order.

➤ The Sin of Unbelief

The *sin* mentioned by Jesus in John 16:8 does not refer to a catalogue of sins one might be guilty of (i.e., lust, greed, worry, gossip, stealing, etc.), but rather, one specific sin, which is unbelief, as Jesus said, “because they do not believe

⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, 362.

¹⁰ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 315.

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in Me” (John 16:9). The word for *sin* is *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία), which in Jesus’ statement is a singular noun that refers to a specific crime; namely, unbelief. Sylva notes, “Here sin is unbelief. Jesus faces people with a decision for or against himself: by belief or unbelief a person decides either for life or for death (John 8:24; 9:41; 16:8–9).”¹¹ There is only one sin that keeps a person out of heaven, and that’s the sin of unbelief. Wiersbe states:

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of one particular sin, the sin of unbelief. The law of God and the conscience of man will convict the sinner of his sins (plural) specifically; but it is the work of the Spirit, through the witness of the believers, to expose the unbelief of the lost world. After all, it is unbelief that condemns the lost sinner (John 3:18–21), not the committing of individual sins. A person could “clean up his life” and quit his or her bad habits and still be lost and go to hell.¹²

The Spirit always performs His work perfectly in the hearts of the lost, but because people have volition, and their hearts are corrupt, the vast majority of people suppress His message (Matt 7:13-14; John 5:39-40; Rom 1:18-32). Only the Holy Spirit can reveal to the human heart the truth about Jesus, as well as the truth about their sin of unbelief. To suppress the Spirit’s work about Jesus as the Son of God and Savior is the greatest of sins possible, as well as the most fatal sin that forever condemns a person to hell. Lightner states:

¹¹ Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 260.

¹² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, 362.

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Apart from God the Father there would have been no plan of salvation. Without God the Son there would have been no provision for salvation. Apart from the work of God the Spirit there would be no application of this great salvation to man's needs. It is the third member of the Godhead who procures salvation for all who believe.¹³

➤ The Righteousness of Jesus

God alone sets the standard for righteousness, not people. Divine righteousness may be defined as the intrinsic, immutable, moral perfection of God, from which He commands all things, in heaven and earth, and declares as just that which conforms to His righteousness and as sinful that which deviates. Borchert is correct when he states, "Humanity is not in control either of the future or of setting the standards for life. That is the work of God."¹⁴ And Merrill C. Tenney states, "Apart from a standard of righteousness, there can be no sin; and there must be an awareness of the holiness of God before a person will realize his own deficiency."¹⁵ Though Jesus was rejected and treated as a criminal, God the Father declared Him righteous and welcomed Him to heaven, His natural home. Jesus is "the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14), and throughout His life "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). The rejection and crucifixion of Jesus was the greatest miscarriage of justice in the history of the human race. Jesus said those who rejected and crucified Him would "rejoice" (John 16:20), but as

¹³ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 196.

¹⁴ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 167.

¹⁵ Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 157.

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Borchert notes, “their rejoicing at being finished with Jesus turned out to be the rejoicing of the damned.”¹⁶ William Hendriksen offers the following insights:

The world, represented by the Jews, was about to crucify Jesus. It was going to say, “He ought to die” (John 19:7); hence, in the name of righteousness it was going to put him to death. It proclaimed aloud that he was anything but righteous. It treated him as an evildoer (John 18:30). But the exact opposite was the truth. Though rejected by the world, he was welcomed by the Father, welcomed home via the cross, the cross which led to the crown...By means of the resurrection the Father would place the stamp of His approval upon His life and work (Acts 2:22, 23, 33; Rom 1:4). He, the very One whom the world had branded as unrighteous, would by means of His victorious going to the Father be marked as the Righteous One (8:46; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 John 2:1; and cf., Luke 23:47). Thus, the world would be convicted with respect to righteousness.¹⁷

Christians do not need to struggle to convince people about the perfect righteousness of Christ, nor of the sinner’s failed righteousness before a holy God. They need only to communicate the biblical truth about Christ and fallen humanity, and leave the Spirit to do what only He can do, to convince them of the truth about Christ as the only Savior of mankind. If unbelievers suppresses the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, then no amount of reasoning or argumentation

¹⁶ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary*, 167.

¹⁷ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 326.

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on the part of Christians will advance the gospel even one inch.

➤ **The Judgment of the Ruler of this World**

A third area where the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of unbelievers concerns judgment, “because the ruler of this world has been judged” (John 16:11). Satan has been judged and found guilty before God. This means that Satan and his world-system is condemned. Being the ruler of this world, Satan naturally rules in the hearts of all unbelievers. Three times Jesus referred to Satan as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Other passages of Scripture call Satan “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4), and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), informing us “that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Satan rules as a tyrant who has “weakened the nations” (Isa 14:12), and currently “deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9). Satan continues to attack God’s people today (1 Pet 5:8), practices deception (2 Cor 11:13-15), and has well developed strategies of warfare (Eph 6:10-12). Furthermore, humanity is living in an “evil age” (Gal 1:4), under “the dominion of Satan” (Acts 26:18), whose sphere of influence is called “the domain of darkness” (Col 1:13). But Satan has been judged and his punishment is pending execution. Furthermore, those who side with Satan in this life will be judged with him in eternity. According to Ryrie, “At the cross, Christ triumphed over Satan, serving notice on unbelievers of their judgment to come.”¹⁸ Radmacher notes, “Satan was judged at the Cross, and the Holy Spirit would convince people of the judgment to come. Satan has been judged, so all who side with him will be judged with him. There is no room for neutrality. A person is

¹⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1712.

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either a child of God or a child of the devil.”¹⁹ Merrill Tenney states:

To convince any unbeliever of sin, righteousness, and judgment is beyond human ability. It may be possible to fix upon him the guilt of some specific sin if there is sufficient evidence to bring him before a jury; but to make him acknowledge the deeper fact, that he is a sinner, evil at heart, and deserving of punishment because he has not believed in Christ, is quite another matter. To bring a man to some standard of ethics is not too difficult; for almost every person has ideals that coincide with the moral law at some point. To create in him the humiliating consciousness that his self-righteousness is as filthy rags in comparison with the spotless linen of the righteousness of God cannot be effected by ordinary persuasion. Many believe in a general law of retribution; but it is almost impossible to convince them that they already stand condemned. Only the power of the Holy Spirit, working from within, can bring about that profound conviction which leads to repentance. The Spirit anticipates and makes effective the ministry of the disciples in carrying the message to unbelievers.²⁰

Satan has been judged and will spend eternity in the lake of fire. Those who reject Christ as Savior naturally default to an alliance with Satan, and these will spend eternity in the lake of fire with him, “the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41). The lake of fire is avoidable. If the lost simply trust in Christ as their

¹⁹ Earl D. Radmacher, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 1350.

²⁰ Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament, 237.

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Savior, they will have eternal life and spend eternity with God in heaven. However, if they reject Christ as Savior, then they will spend eternity in hell, for “if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15).

The Spirit’s Regeneration, Indwelling, Baptizing, and Sealing Ministry

At the moment of salvation, God the Holy Spirit performs several acts for new believers, which include regeneration (John 3:6; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 1:3), indwelling (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), baptizing (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27), and sealing (Eph 4:30).

➤ **Regeneration**

The word *regeneration* itself occurs only twice in the Bible (Matt 19:28 and Tit 3:5). In both places the Greek word used is *paliggenesia* (παλιγγενεσία), which means, “the state of being renewed... [the] experience of a complete change of life, rebirth of a redeemed person.”²¹ Regeneration means new believers receive spiritual life at the moment they trust in Christ alone as their Savior. Geisler states, “The new birth of which Jesus speaks is the act of regeneration, whereby God imparts spiritual life to the believer’s soul (1 Peter 1:23).”²² Paul Enns agrees, saying, “Succinctly stated, to regenerate means ‘to impart life.’ Regeneration is the act whereby God imparts life to the one who believes.”²³ Ryrie notes:

²¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 752.

²² Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 123.

²³ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 338.

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Although the word regeneration is used only twice in the Bible (Titus 3:5, where it refers to the new birth, and Mt 19:28 where it refers to the millennial kingdom), the concept of being born again is found in other passages, notably John 3. Technically, it is God's act of begetting eternal life in the one who believes in Christ. While faith and regeneration are closely associated, the two ideas are distinct, faith being the human responsibility and the channel through which God's grace is received, and regeneration being God's supernatural act of imparting eternal life.²⁴

David Anderson adds:

The NT uses a number of different words and images to convey the doctrine of regeneration. The noun *palingenesia* is used just twice: Matthew 19:28 and Titus 3:5. In Matthew, Jesus is speaking of the regeneration which will occur at His second coming. He refers to setting up His kingdom, placing the twelve over the twelve tribes of Israel, and rewarding those who have sacrificed for His cause. But in Titus 3:5, we have a direct reference to the rebirth of the believer: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."²⁵

To the concept of regeneration, the Greek words *anōthen* (ἀνωθεν) and *anagennaō* (ἀναγεννάω) can be added. Jesus, while speaking to Nicodemus, said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [*anōthen*] he cannot see the

²⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*.

²⁵ David R. Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology*, ed. James S. Reitman, Revised Edition. (Grace Theology Press, 2012), 235.

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kingdom of God” (John 3:3; cf., John 3:7). The word *anōthen* (ἀνωθεν) generally means “from a source that is above.”²⁶ That is, from a heavenly source. (At least two English translations, NET & YLT, render the word “from above”). Because Nicodemus confused physical birth with spiritual birth (John 3:4), Jesus clarified His statement, saying, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Jesus was talking about spiritual birth, or regeneration, which comes from the source of heaven. Peter used the Greek word *anagennaō* (ἀναγεννάω) when he wrote about Christians who have been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3), and who “have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet 1:23). The basic meaning of *anagennaō* (ἀναγεννάω) is to “beget again, cause to be born again.”²⁷ In both instances the word denotes imparting new life.

This work of the Spirit is directly related to the believer’s salvation. According to Walvoord, “The work of regeneration can be assigned to the Holy Spirit as definitely as the work of salvation can be assigned to Christ.”²⁸ And the believer’s new life is the basis for a new walk with the Lord. Ryrie notes, “Regeneration does not make a man perfect, but it places him in the family of God and gives him the new ability to please his Father by growing into the image of Christ. Fruit from the new nature is proof that regeneration has occurred (1 John 2:29).”²⁹ Lighter states:

²⁶ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 92.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁸ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 131.

²⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*.

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The means by which regeneration is accomplished eliminates all human endeavor. Though personal faith in Christ as Savior is necessary, faith does not produce the new life; it does not regenerate. Only God regenerates. Human faith and divine regeneration occur at the same time, but the one is man's responsibility as he is enabled by the Holy Spirit, and the other is the work of God imparting the divine life.³⁰

➤ **Indwelling**

The indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit for every believer was an innovation that was future from the time of Jesus' ministry on earth. Jesus said, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:38). And John tells us, "But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). The Spirit would begin His special ministry on the day of Pentecost, and it would involve His personal indwelling of every believer. Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus spoke of this, saying, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17). Notice that Spirit would not only be *with* them, would be *in* them. Merrill Tenney writes, "This distinction marks the difference between the Old Testament experience of the Holy Spirit and the post-Pentecostal experience of the church. The individual indwelling of the Spirit is the specific privilege of the Christian believer."³¹

³⁰ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 199.

³¹ Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, 147.

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This new indwelling ministry by God the Holy Spirit is different than His work in believers in the OT. Under the Mosaic Law, only a select few received the Holy Spirit (Ex 31:1-5; Num 11:25; 27:18; 1 Sam 16:13), and that was conditioned on His sovereign purposes. But now, in the dispensation of the church age, God the Holy Spirit would personally indwell both the local church (1 Cor 3:16-17), as well as each individual believer (1 Cor 6:19). Paul wrote to the Christians living in Corinth, saying, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16).

Paul also describes the Spirit’s indwelling each Christian in 1 Corinthians 6:19, where he wrote, “do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” According to Constable, “Previously Paul taught his readers that the Corinthian church was a temple (*naos*; 1 Cor 3:16). The believer’s body is also a temple. The Holy Spirit is actually indwelling each of these temples (Rom 8:9; cf. Matt 12:6; 18:15–20; 28:16–20; Mark 13:11; John 14:17, 23).”³² What we find in the church age is that all three Persons of the Godhead indwell every believer (John 14:16-17, 20, 23); however, the Holy Spirit has a special ministry which began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4; 11:15-16; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-28), and will continue until the church is raptured to heaven (2 Th 2:7; cf. John 14:1-3; 1 Th 4:13-18; Tit 2:13). Chafer states:

The Spirit made His advent into the world here to abide throughout this dispensation. As Christ is now located at the right hand of the Father, though

³² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Cor 6:18.

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omnipresent, so the Spirit, though omnipresent, is now locally abiding in the world, in a temple, or habitation, of living stones (Eph 2:19-22). The individual believer is also spoken of as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). The Spirit will not leave the world, or even one stone of that building until the age-long purpose of forming that temple is finished...The Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost and that aspect of the meaning of Pentecost will no more be repeated than the incarnation of Christ. There is no occasion to call the Spirit to “*come*,” for He is here.³³

➤ **Baptizing**

The subject of baptism has been, and continues to be, a subject of confusion. The word *baptize* is a transliteration of the Greek verb *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) which broadly means to “*plunge, dip, [or] wash*,”³⁴ and is often used “of the Christian sacrament of initiation after Jesus’ death.”³⁵ The Greek noun *baptisma* (βάπτισμα) refers to the result of a dipping or immersing. In Classical Greek literature, the verb *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) “was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another.”³⁶ The Greek poet Nicander (ca. 200 B.C.) used both *bapto* (βάπτω) and *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) when describing the process of making pickles. According to James Strong, “When used in the New Testament, this word more often

³³ Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan Publishing, 1967), 26.

³⁴ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 164.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁶ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 50.

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refers to our union and identification with Christ than to our water baptism.”³⁷

There are numerous baptisms mentioned in the Bible, some are wet and some are dry. John the Baptist said, “I baptize you with water” (Matt 3:11a), clearly making the baptism wet. But then, John the Baptist spoke of Jesus, saying, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt 3:11b). These latter two baptisms are both dry, where no one gets placed into water. A few other baptisms mentioned in Scripture include the baptism of the cross (Mark 10:35-38; Luke 12:50), the baptism of Moses (1 Cor 10:1-2), and the baptism of Christians (Matt 28:16-20). For the Christian, water baptism is a picture of the believer’s spiritual union and identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:3-7; Col 2:11-12). Water baptism does not save (1 Cor 1:17). It never has and never will. God saves at the moment believers place their faith solely in Jesus (John 3:16; 1 Cor 15:3-4). At the moment of faith in Christ, God the Holy Spirit unites new believers spiritually to Christ, adding them to the church, the body of Christ. Paul wrote, “For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12-13). Lewis Chafer states, “As a ground upon which the certainty of eternal security rests, the baptism of the Spirit should be recognized as that operation by which the individual believer is brought into organic union with Christ. By the Spirit’s regeneration Christ is resident in the believer, and by the Spirit’s baptism the believer is thus in Christ.”³⁸ Merrill F. Unger comments:

³⁷ James Strong, βάπτω *baptō*, *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).

³⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 337.

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This momentous spiritual operation is set forth in the NT as the basis of all the believer's positions and possessions "in Christ" (Eph 1:3; Col 2:10; 3:1–4; etc.). The operation is prophetic in the gospels (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16–17; John 1:33–34, where Christ is the baptizer), historic in the Acts (cf. Acts 1:5 with Acts 11:16), and doctrinal in the epistles (1 Cor 12:13, where the Spirit is named specifically as the agent; Rom 6:3–4; Gal 3:26–27; Col 2:9–12; Eph 4:5). The Spirit's baptizing work, placing the believer "in Christ," occurred initially at Pentecost at the advent of the Spirit, who baptized believing Jews "into Christ." In Acts 8, Samaritans were baptized in this way for the first time; in Acts 10, Gentiles likewise were so baptized, at which point the normal agency of the Spirit as baptizer was attained. According to the clear teaching of the epistles, every believer is baptized by the Spirit into Christ the moment he is regenerated. He is also simultaneously indwelt by the Spirit and sealed eternally, with the privilege of being filled with the Spirit, as the conditions for filling are met.³⁹

➤ Sealing

Several times Paul used the Greek verb *sphragizō* (σφραγίζω) when writing to Christians. Paul wrote of God "who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge" (2 Cor 1:22). To the Christians at Ephesus he wrote, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13), and "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were

³⁹ Merrill F. Unger and R.K. Harrison, "Baptism of the Spirit," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

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sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). In each of these uses the verb *sphragizō* (σφραγίζω) means “to mark with a seal as a means of identification...so that the mark denoting ownership also carries with it the protection of the owner.”⁴⁰ Laney Jr., states, “In ancient times a seal was used as an identifying mark, indicating the rightful ownership of the object sealed. And so the sealing ministry of the Spirit marks believers as God’s own possession, guaranteeing their security for eternity.”⁴¹ Concerning Paul’s use of *sphragizō* (σφραγίζω) in Ephesians 1:13, Harold Hoehner comments:

God seals the believers in Christ with the promised Holy Spirit when they have not only heard but also believed the gospel of salvation. The sealing with the Spirit must not be confused with the other ministries of the Spirit. The indwelling of the Spirit refers to his residence in every believer (Rom 8:9; 1 John 2:27). The baptizing ministry of the Spirit places believers into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). The filling by the Spirit is the control of the Spirit over believers’ lives (Eph 5:18). The sealing ministry of the Spirit is to identify believers as God’s own and thus give them the security that they belong to him (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22). The very fact that the Spirit indwells believers is a seal of God’s ownership of them.⁴²

The Holy Spirit is Himself the seal that marks us as owned by God and guarantees our future redemption and glory (Eph 1:13-14; 4:30). These blessings are completely the work of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of Christians and occur

⁴⁰ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 980.

⁴¹ J. Carl Laney Jr., “Soteriology”, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 239.

⁴² Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 240.

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at the moment believers trust Jesus as their Savior. These are facts based on objective statements in Scripture and are accepted by faith, not ever-changing subjective feelings. Though Christians can grieve and/or quench the Holy Spirit with personal sin (Eph 4:30; 1 Th 5:19), and though they may suffer divine discipline because of personal sin (Heb 12:5-11), they cannot grieve Him away. Joseph Dillow notes:

The ancient practice of using seals is behind the figurative use of the word here. A seal was a mark of protection and ownership. The Greek word *sphragizō* is used of a stone being fastened with a seal to “prevent its being moved from a position” (BDAG). In fact, this was apparently the earliest method of distinguishing one’s property. The seal was engraved with a design or mark distinctive to the owner. The seal of ownership or protection was often made in soft wax with a signet ring. An impression was left on the wax signifying the owner of the thing sealed. When the Holy Spirit seals us, He presses the signet ring of our heavenly Father on our hearts of wax and leaves the mark of ownership. We belong to Him. He certifies this by His unchangeable purpose to protect and own us to the day of redemption. In Ephesians 1:13-14, we are told that the Holy Spirit Himself is the seal. He is impressed upon us, so to speak. His presence in our lives is thus a guarantee of God’s protection and that we are owned by God. A broken seal was an indication that the person had not been protected. The Holy Spirit cannot be broken. He is the seal of ownership. In Ephesians 4:30, we are told that we are sealed unto the day of redemption. This sealing ministry of the Spirit is forever and guarantees that we will arrive safely for the redemption of our bodies and entrance into heaven

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(Romans 8:23). He is the seal that we are now owned and protected by God until the day of redemption.⁴³

⁴³ Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings, 4th Edition* (Houston, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2018).

The Suffering & Death of Christ

The Suffering & Death of Christ

When God the Son added perfect humanity to Himself, this enabled Him to experience suffering and death with, and on behalf of, humanity. The suffering of Christ may be viewed in at least two ways: 1) His suffering during His time on earth prior to the cross, and 2) the suffering of the cross. As the God-Man, Jesus was perfectly holy in all His thoughts, words, and actions. Such perfect holiness brought with it a special form of suffering in this world that the rest of us could never know, since we are capable of yielding to the pressures of sinful temptation. When the time of His death was nearing, Jesus told His disciples “that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (Matt 16:21; cf., Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). It’s noteworthy that Jesus said His suffering, dying, and resurrection were things that “must” happen to Him. The use of the Greek verb *dei* (δεῖ) here denotes divine necessity, which meant it was the will of God the Father that these things happen to Christ. Thomas Constable notes, “Jesus said that it was necessary (Gr. *dei*) for Him to go to Jerusalem. He had to do this because it was God’s will for Messiah to suffer, die, and rise from the dead. He had to do these things to fulfill prophecy (Isa 53; cf. Acts 2:22–36).”¹ The absolute necessity of Jesus’ death on the cross further emphasizes our helplessness to save ourselves, for if our salvation could have been secured by any other means, then the death of Christ would have been unnecessary.

While in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to God the Father, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matt 26:39). In His humanity, Jesus struggled to face the cross,

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mt 16:21.

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understanding the scope of what it meant and the agony associated with it. Jesus prayed a second time, saying, “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done” (Matt 26:42). The reference to the “cup” speaks of the suffering of the cross. John A. Witmer states, “In the Old Testament a ‘cup’ sometimes symbolized wrath (Jer 25:15), and so Jesus was aware that His coming death meant He would bear the wrath of God the Father against sin. Though Christ had no sin (2 Cor 5:21), He bore the sins of the world on Himself (1 Pet 2:24). Thus He was made ‘a curse for us’ because of His being hanged on a tree (Gal 3:13).”²

While on the cross, Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt 27:46). This was the cry of Jesus from His humanity. Peter tells us that Jesus “Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Pet 2:24). Peter’s reference to Jesus’ “body” indicates humanity, not deity. Sin cannot be imputed to deity. Humanity can bear sin. It was while Jesus was on the cross that He bore the wrath of the Father as He died in our place and bore the punishment that rightfully belongs to us. And the Spirit sustained Jesus’ humanity while He bore our sins. Robert G. Gromacki states, “God the Son incarnate suffered and died. The Father did not suffer and die. Nor did the Holy Spirit suffer and die, even though He filled Christ when the Savior suffered and died.”³ The suffering and death of Jesus on the cross was salvific, as Jesus was made “sin on our behalf” (2 Cor 5:21). Mark wrote, “When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Mark

² John A. Witmer, “Jesus Christ”, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 352.

³ Robert G. Gromacki, “The Holy Spirit”, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 468–469.

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15:33-34; cf., Matt 27:45-46; Luke 23:44-46). Concerning this moment on the cross, Witmer states, “It was at this point, as Jesus bore the sin of the world, that God, the Judge of sin, turned away from Jesus Christ, His incarnate Son, the Sin-bearer, as far as the personal consciousness of Jesus was concerned.”⁴ But there is some mystery at work here, for God the Father could not forsake God the Son, as a separation within the Trinity is not possible. Yet, somehow, the humanity of Christ—not His deity—was forsaken at the time of the judgment on the cross, otherwise the words of Jesus would be meaningless. But Jesus’ suffering and death did happen, and it was His time on the cross that brought about our salvation; a salvation that is applied to us at the moment we trust in Christ as our Savior.

Even after Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus said to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26). In the book of Acts, Luke records that Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering” (Acts 1:3). Peter said, “the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18). And Paul reasoned “from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead” (Acts 17:2b-3; cf., Acts 26:23). Jesus’ suffering and death were necessary for salvation to be available to humanity.

⁴ John A. Witmer, “Jesus Christ”, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 352.

The Cross & Crucifixion

The Cross & Crucifixion

The cross overshadowed the life of Jesus, and He knew dying for lost sinners was the ultimate purpose of the Father. When facing the cross, Jesus said, “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour” (John 12:27). For lost sinners, the cross of Christ is both personal and purposeful. It is personal, because “Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8), “for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3), and “not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). And His death was purposeful, as Christ “died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18), and that we might “reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). 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.

The word “cross” translates the Greek noun *stauros* (σταυρός), which refers to “a pole to be placed in the ground and used for capital punishment, cross.”¹ The word “crucify” translates the Greek verb *stauroō* (σταυρώω), which means, “to fasten to a cross, crucify.”² Crucifixion was practiced by ancient cultures such as the Egyptians (Gen 40:19), Persians (Est 7:10), Assyrians and Greeks. By the time of Christ, the Romans had used crucifixion as a means of death more than previous cultures. According to John Stott:

¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 941.

² *Ibid.*, 941.

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Crucifixion seems to have been invented by “barbarians” on the edge of the known world and taken over from them by both Greeks and Romans. It is probably the most cruel method of execution ever practiced, for it deliberately delayed death until maximum torture had been inflicted. The victim could suffer for days before dying. When the Romans adopted it, they reserved it for criminals convicted of murder, rebellion or armed robbery, provided that they were also slaves, foreigners or other nonpersons.³

Just prior to crucifixion, a person was scourged with a whip which had thongs that were braided with sharp objects such as nails. As an act of public humiliation, criminals carried their own cross to the place of execution, and once there, were stripped naked before being fastened to the cross, either with rope or nails. Being tied to a cross with ropes was less painful in the beginning, but would leave the victim to hang for a longer period of time, even days, which would make the experience more painful in the end. Some who were tied to the cross are recorded to have lasted for nine days. Nailing a person to a cross was more painful from the beginning and would have led to a quicker death. The body would hang between three to four feet from the ground. Sometimes a soporific was given to the victim to help numb the senses. In Jesus case, it was “wine mixed with myrrh” (Mark 15:23), which our Lord rejected because it would have clouded His thinking (Matt 27:34). In some situations the Romans would break the victim’s legs which would hasten death, but according to Scripture, Jesus was already dead by the time the soldiers considered doing this (John 19:32-34). Unger notes, “In most cases the body was allowed to rot on the cross by the action of the sun and rain or to be devoured by birds and

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 29.

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beasts.”⁴ We know that Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, came to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body, that he might bury it, and Pilate granted his request (Matt 27:57-60). It’s most likely that Jesus was crucified in April, AD 33.⁵

The cross of Christ became central to the message of the gospel. The apostle Paul was sent by the Lord Jesus “to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void” (1 Cor 1:17). Paul was not concerned with human sophistry, winning arguments, or impressing his audience by means of rhetorical prowess, but merely with presenting the simple message of the cross of Christ, which brings eternal salvation to those who trust in Jesus as their Savior. Paul continued his line of reasoning, saying, “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...[and] we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:18; 23-24). Paul summarized his message when he said, “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). The image of a crucified Savior seems entirely foolish to a world that creates its saviors out of strong heroes; strong in the human sense of one who can save himself and others. Jesus is certainly strong; after all, He’s God! And He does save forever those who come to Him in faith. However, the humility of the cross, with all its offense and shame, leaves no place for human wisdom or pride; for one must admit it was his sin that placed Messiah on the cross to be judged and die. To come to Jesus as a crucified Messiah requires humility, for one must

⁴ Merrill Frederick Unger et al., “Cross”, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 264.

⁵ See Harold Hoehner’s book, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, pages 95-114.

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honestly look at oneself from the divine perspective and admit he is a lost sinner in need of a Savior. A Savior who was willing to lay down His life and bear the punishment of the guilty. This requires truth, to see oneself from the divine perspective as utterly sinful and lost. And it requires humility, to admit one is powerless and cannot save himself from a damnable future to which he is certainly headed. It is the work of Messiah that saves. Nothing more is required. Jesus paid it all. W. E. Vine notes, “‘The Cross of Christ’ does far more than express the fact of the infinite love of God to man in the death of His Son; it exposes the enmity of the human heart against God, reveals the true nature of sin as in the sight of God, and makes known the impossibility of bridging, by any human effort, the chasm that separates unregenerate man from God.”⁶ Wendell Johnston adds:

The cross stands at the center of Paul’s theology (1 Cor 1:23). He saw this humiliating and cruel instrument in a new light—as the extraordinary opportunity to boast in his Savior (Gal 6:14). The shameful cross stood for everything the world despised and thus His allegiance to Christ separated him from the world. Jesus’ death was like a magnet drawing the outcasts of the world to Christ (John 12:32). It makes human wisdom foolish (1 Cor 1:27) and weak people strong (1 Cor 1:25), and it breaks the spirit of the proud and lifts up the meek and humble (1 Cor 1:28). Because of His death Jesus breaks the shackles of those in bondage who believe in Him. The Cross brings peace to those in fear (Heb 2:14–15), and it unites Jews and Gentiles into one body (Eph 2:16). The Cross brought complete fulfillment to the system of the Mosaic Law and did away with all the regulations standing against

⁶ W. E. Vine and C. F. Hogg, *Vine’s Topical Commentary: Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 108-109.

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humanity (Col 2:14–18). Because of the Cross, God gives eternal life to those who believe (Rom 5:18). The Cross, which to the world seemed proof of defeat, became the means of triumph (Col 2:15).⁷

The cross represents the love of the Father, as “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). And it represents the love of Jesus for us, as Paul wrote of “the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal 2:20b).

Paul saw himself as crucified with Jesus, as he wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20a). The words “crucified with” translates the Greek verb *sustauroō* (συσταυρώω), which means one is crucified with another. This is used in a literal sense of persons crucified in physical proximity to each other, such as “The robbers who had been crucified with Him”, that is, Jesus (Matt 27:44; cf., Mark 15:32; John 19:32). But Paul uses the word in Galatians 2:20 in a spiritual sense, in which he is identified with Christ on the cross. This same spiritual identification truth is for all who have trusted in Christ as our Savior, for to be “crucified with Christ” means that we are identified with our Lord in His death, burial, and resurrection. God sees us there at the cross, with Christ, dying with Him. Paul states, “our old self was crucified with Him” (Rom 6:6), and “we have died with Christ” (Rom 6:8). Furthermore, we partook of His burial, resurrection, and ascension, for “we have been buried with Him” (Rom 6:4), and “raised up with Christ” (Col 3:1; cf., Eph 2:6a), and even now are seen to be seated “with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6b). Concerning Galatians 2:20, William MacDonald states:

⁷ Wendell G. Johnston, “Cross”, *The Theological Wordbook*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, Inc., 2000), 77–78.

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The believer is identified with Christ in His death. Not only was He crucified on Calvary, I was crucified there as well—in Him. This means the end of me as a sinner in God’s sight. It means the end of me as a person seeking to merit or earn salvation by my own efforts. It means the end of me as a child of Adam, as a man under the condemnation of the law, as my old, unregenerate self. The old, evil “I” has been crucified; it has no more claims on my daily life.⁸

⁸ William MacDonal, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, 1880.

Who Crucified Jesus?

Who Crucified Jesus?

The question is sometimes raised as to who crucified Jesus? According to Chafer, “Closely related to the contrast between the divine and human sides of Christ’s death, is the question: Who put Christ to death? As already indicated, the Scriptures assign both a human and a divine responsibility for Christ’s death.”¹ According to the testimony of Scripture, Jesus’ death on the cross was the result of: 1) God the Father who sent Him, 2) Jesus who willingly went to the cross, 3), Satan who worked through others to help crucify Him, 4) unbelieving Jews, and 5) unbelieving Gentiles. The Bible verses that address the various persons involved in the crucifixion of Jesus are intermixed. That is, a passage might address God the Father and Jesus, or Jews and Gentiles, or Satan and Jews, etc. It is from these Scripture passages that the following categories as recognized.

➤ **God the Father Sent Christ to Die**

Who crucified Jesus? The ultimate answer is God the Father. The Father was motivated by His love for us to save us; therefore, His plan of salvation involved sending His Son into the world to die in our place. The record of Scripture is, “But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief” (Isa 53:10a), and “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16a), and “this Man [Jesus], was delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23a), and Peter, praying to the Father, said, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 49.

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and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27-28), and “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all” (Rom 8:32). Chafer notes, “Human hands might inflict physical suffering and death as any victim would die, but only the hand of God could make Christ a sin offering, or could lay on Him the iniquity of others (2 Cor 5:21; Isa 53:6).”²

➤ **Jesus Willingly Went to the Cross**

Though the Father sent Jesus into the world to be an atoning sacrifice for sin, He did not force Him onto the cross. Jesus consented to come into the world and go to the cross and die for us. He voluntarily laid down His life. The writer of Hebrews states, “Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me’” (Heb 10:5). Jesus, in hypostatic union, speaking from His humanity, said, “Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God” (Heb 10:7). Constable notes, “Jesus was not some dumb animal that offered its life without knowing what it was doing. He consciously, voluntarily, and deliberately offered His life in obedience to God’s will.”³ Jesus’ voluntary death on the cross is found in several passages. Jesus said, “I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:15), and “no one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative” (John 10:18). Paul wrote, “Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph 5:2), and “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25), and “the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal 2:20), and “who gave Himself for us to redeem us

² Ibid., 51.

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*, Heb 10:5.

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from every lawless deed” (Tit 2:14). The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Christ “offered up Himself” (Heb 7:27; cf., Heb 9:14).

➤ Satan Was Instrumental in Jesus’ Crucifixion

The very first prophesy related to the cross is found in Genesis, when God told Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Gen 3:15). Concerning Genesis 3:15, Chafer notes, “it is implied that Satan did what he could in the exercise of his power—directly, or indirectly, through human agents—against the Savior.”⁴ Satan’s seed refers to all those who reject God and Christ and are part of Satan’s kingdom of darkness.⁵ Jesus said to unbelieving Jews, “You are of your father the devil” (John 8:44), and all unbelievers are “the sons of the evil one” (Matt 13:38). These were used by Satan to help in the crucifixion of Christ. On the night before Jesus’ crucifixion, John records, “During supper, the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him” (John 13:2). During the meal, Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me” (John 13:21), and “After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, ‘What you do, do quickly’” (John 13:27). Here we observe a coalescence of Satanic and human activity to betray Jesus to those who would crucify Him. In this regard, Satan was the motivating force behind

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 49.

⁵ The seed of Satan ultimately relates to the coming Antichrist, who will, during the time of the Tribulation, seek to destroy Israel and prevent the coming of Jesus to rule over the earth. See Arnold Fruchtenbaum’s comments on Genesis 3:15 in his book, *The Book of Genesis, Ariel’s Bible Commentary*.

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Judas, his willing instrument, to bring about the death of Jesus.⁶

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the chief priests, officers of the temple, and Jewish elders came to arrest Jesus (Luke 22:52a), and He said to them, “While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours” (Luke 22:53). Those who came physically to “lay hands” on Jesus were the Jewish authorities who conspired to kill Him. God, in His sovereignty, permitted this to happen, because it served His greater purposes to bring about salvation through the cross. But even though it was their *hour* to act, these men were not acting alone, as Luke’s reference to “the power of darkness” demonstrates that Satan was behind them, driving them on as his agents of lies and destruction. Later, Luke would use the term *darkness* as a symbol of the sphere of Satan’s authority (Acts 26:18), as would Paul (Col 1:13).

➤ **Unbelieving Jews Crucified Jesus**

Though it was the Romans who actually placed Jesus on the cross and drove the nails, it was, according to Scripture, unbelieving Jews who conspired and lied about Jesus to have Him crucified (Matt 26:3-4; John 11:53). At the time of Jesus’ trial before Pilate, the Jews who were present all shouted, “Crucify Him” (Matt 27:22). God permitted Jesus’ crucifixion, both by the Jews and Romans, because it served

⁶ On a separate occasion, after Jesus was born, Satan wanted to kill the baby Jesus. The apostle John—operating from divine viewpoint—records that Satan, “stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth, he might devour her child” (Rev 12:4). But Satan’s attack was not direct; rather, King Herod was his tool to accomplish the nefarious deed. Matthew records the account in his Gospel (Matt 2:1-23). Herod was the human agent who wanted to kill Jesus, but Satan was the motivating force behind the attack.

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His greater purpose. Luke recorded Peter, who said, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:22-23). Clearly this address was to the “Men of Israel,” who rejected Jesus and “nailed [Him] to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:23; cf. Acts 4:10; 5:30; 10:39). In Acts 4:27, Luke recorded that there were “gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus...the peoples of Israel” (Acts 4:27), to crucify Him. Paul wrote about “the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets” (1 Th 2:14b-15a).

➤ **Unbelieving Gentiles Crucified Jesus**

Though many unbelieving Jews were directly responsible for collaborating in the crucifixion of Jesus, it was Gentiles who actually did the work of placing Him on the cross. That’s what Jesus foretold His disciples, saying, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up” (Matt 20:18-19). It was said of the Roman soldiers, “After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him” (Matt 27:31). Luke records in Acts, “truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel” (Acts 4:27).

As Christians, we must not see Christ dying at a distant time or place. We should see our own hands driving the nails

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that put Him there and then lifting the cross. The crucifixion was not only for us, but by us. It was our sin that necessitated His death and judgment. We must see Jesus bearing all our sin and paying the penalty of the Father's wrath that rightfully belongs to us. In May 2006, I wrote the following poem as I thought about the role I played in placing Jesus on the cross.

Who Crucified Jesus?

Christ to the Cross

I and the Father led Christ to the cross,
Together we placed Him there;
I pushed Him forward, no care for the cost,
His Father's wrath to bear.
Christ in the middle not wanting to die,
Knelt in the garden and prayed;
Great tears of blood the Savior did cry,
Yet His Father He humbly obeyed.

So He carried His cross down a dusty trail,
No words on His lips were found;
No cry was uttered as I drove the nails,
His arms to the cross were bound.
I lifted my Savior with arms spread wide,
He hung between heaven and earth;
I raised my spear and pierced His side,
What flowed was of infinite worth.

Like a Lamb to the altar Christ did go,
A sacrifice without blemish or spot;
A knife was raised, and life did flow,
In a basin the blood was caught.
Past the incense table and the dark black veil,
To that holy of holy places;
The blood of Christ was made to avail,
And all my sins it erases.

Now this Lamb on a cross was a demonstration
Of the Father's love for me;
For the Savior's death brought satisfaction,
Redeemed, and set me free.
Now I come to the Savior by faith alone,
Not trusting in works at all;
Jesus my substitute for sin did atone,
Salvation in answer to His call.

What Jesus Suffered by Man & God

What Jesus Suffered by Man & God

What Jesus Suffered by Man

Jesus loved the Father (John 14:31) and submitted Himself to do the Father's will (Matt 26:39-44; cf. Rom 5:19; Phil 2:5-8), which included enduring the illegal trials of His accusers, as well as the eventual mockings, beatings, and crucifixion. All that Jesus suffered was prophesied in Scripture (Gen 3:15; Psa 22:16-18; Isa 50:4-7; 52:14; 53:3-12; Matt 26:67-68; Mark 10:32-34). God the Father was in complete control of the circumstances surrounding the trials and crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Though unjustly attacked, Jesus knew He was doing the Father's will (John 6:38; 10:14-18; 12:27; 18:11) and did not retaliate against His attackers (1 Pet 2:21-23). The four Gospels record the arrest, trials, mocking, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke refer to events taking place according to Jewish time in which the day ends at sunset; whereas John relies on Gentile time in which the day ends at midnight. A brief chronology of Jesus' trials, mockings, beatings, crucifixion and burial is as follows:

1. Jesus was arrested during the night—perhaps around midnight—and faced six illegal trials, three religious and three civil.¹ The trials must have happened relatively early, as they concluded “about six in the morning” (John 19:14 CSB).²

¹ Jesus' religious trials: 1) Annas (John 18:12-24), 2) Caiaphas (Matt 26:57-66), and 3) the Sanhedrin (Matt 27:1-2). Jesus' civil trials: 1) Pilate (John 18:28-40), 2) Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12), and 3) Pilate (Luke 23:11; John 19:1-16).

² This CSB assumes John calculates events using Roman time (where the day begins after midnight) rather than Jewish time (where the day starts at sunrise). The ESV and NAU translate the Greek literally, “about the sixth hour,” whereas the NET and NIV translate it, “about

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2. During the religious trials, the chief priest and Sanhedrin tried to secure false testimony about Jesus so they might have grounds to crucify Him (Matt 26:59).
3. Jesus was beaten in the face and mocked during His Jewish trial (Matt 26:67-68).
4. After Pilate agreed to the demands of the mob (Matt 27:17-25), he had Jesus scourged (Matt 27:26a), and then “handed Him over to be crucified” (Matt 27:26b).
5. Jesus was mocked and beaten by Roman soldiers (Matt 27:27-30), and then was led away to be crucified (Matt 27:31).
6. Jesus was crucified by 9:00 AM (Mark 15:25).
7. Jesus was judged by the Father and bore our sins on the cross from 12:00 to 3:00 PM (Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44).
8. Jesus died about 3:00 PM (Matt 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37).
9. Jesus’ body was placed in the grave before 6:00 PM (i.e. sunset) because the Jews did not want His body on the cross for the Sabbath (John 19:31, 38-42).³

The Jewish trials declared Jesus guilty, whereas the Gentile trials found Him innocent. Jesus was crucified by Gentiles because of the pressure of the Jewish leadership. The crucifixion of Jesus was physically horrendous and involved not only great physical pain, but also psychological anguish

noon.” If the sixth hour is calculated by Roman time, then it would be about 6:00 AM, and if calculated by Jewish time, it would be about 12:00 PM. This author favors the CSB translation.

³ After His death, Jesus was resurrected on the third day and appeared to numerous persons over a period of forty days (Matt 28:1-10; John 20:10-29; 1 Cor 15:5-7). Afterwards, Jesus ascended bodily into heaven (Acts 1:9-12). It is recorded that God the Father “raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:20).

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and social humiliation. According to William Hendriksen, crucifixion included “severe inflammation, the swelling of the wounds in the region of the nails, unbearable pain from torn tendons, fearful discomfort from the strained position of the body, throbbing headache, and burning thirst (John 19:28).”⁴

What Jesus Suffered by God the Father

As previously mentioned, Jesus was not a helpless victim, but willingly laid down His life for us. Jesus said, “I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:15), and “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative” (John 10:18). Scripture reveals that God the Father sent His Son “as an offering for sin” (Rom 8:3), and once Jesus was on the cross, made Him “to be sin on our behalf” (2 Cor 5:21a), and was “smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4), as “the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (Isa 53:6), and “the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering” (Isa 53:10). Thieme states:

At the third hour of crucifixion, noontime, ordinarily the brightest period of the day, an impenetrable “darkness fell upon all the land” (Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). For the following three hours, so intense was the suffering of Jesus Christ that the Father hid the Son’s face from view. Jesus had borne in silence the scourging, the ridicule, and the agony of crucifixion (Isa 53:7; Acts 8:32–35), but the anguish of bearing the sins of the world caused Him to scream out again and again, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34; cf. Ps

⁴ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 427.

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22:1). The Father had to turn His back on the Son in order to judge Him on our behalf (2 Cor 5:21).⁵

Geisler adds:

At the center of Christianity is the Cross; it is the very purpose for which Christ came into the world. Without Him salvation is not possible, and only through His finished work can we be delivered from our sins (Rom 3:21–26). Jesus suffered unimaginable agony and even separation from His beloved Father (Heb 2:10–17; 5:7–9); anticipating the Cross, His “sweat became as it were great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). Why the Cross and all this suffering unless there is a hell? If there is no hell to shun, then the Cross was in vain. Christ’s death is robbed of its eternal significance unless there is a hellish eternal destiny from which sinful souls need to be delivered.⁶

Jesus was Forsaken by God the Father

The Bible teaches that sin creates a separation between God and people. Isaiah wrote, “Your iniquities have made a **separation** between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (Isa 59:2). When Jesus died on the cross, He took all our sins upon Himself and died in our place. Scripture states, “The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6) and “He will bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11). Additionally, Jesus gave “His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), “Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8), was “an offering for sin...in the flesh” (Rom

⁵ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Cross and Crucifixion”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 50.

⁶ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things*, 336–337.

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8:3), “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3), was made “to be sin on our behalf” (2 Cor 5:21), “tasted death for everyone” (Heb 2:9), was “offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28), “bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Pet 2:24), and “Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust” (1 Pet 3:18).

Jesus bore our sins without being contaminated by them due to His unique nature as the theanthropic person. As both fully God and fully man, Jesus’ divine nature was incorruptible and could not be tainted by sin, while His humanity was perfectly sinless and in complete obedience to God the Father (John 1:1, 14; Col 2:9; Heb 4:15; 1 John 3:5). The Bible teaches that our sins were imputed to Jesus, meaning they were legally credited to His account without making Him a sinner in essence (2 Cor 5:21). He bore the penalty and punishment for our sins as our substitute, fulfilling His role as the sacrificial lamb (John 1:29; 1 Pet 1:18-19). This act satisfied God’s justice while preserving Jesus’ purity. Theologically, God’s justice required a payment for sin, which Jesus provided in His mercy without becoming inherently sinful. This concept is rooted in Old Testament sacrificial practices, where an unblemished lamb would bear the sins of the people symbolically. Jesus perfectly fulfilled this typology as the ultimate, spotless Lamb of God (Heb 9:12-14). Thus, through imputation and substitutionary atonement, Jesus took the punishment for our sins while remaining the sinless and spotless Lamb of God.

Jesus was Forsaken on the Cross

While Jesus was bearing our sins on the cross, He was briefly separated from God the Father. This is reflected in His words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). The word “forsaken” translates the Greek verb *egkataleipō* (ἐγκαταλείπω), which, according to BDAG, means “to separate connection with someone or something;

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forsake, abandon, desert.”⁷ The same Greek word is used elsewhere to describe the literal separation of one person from another (2 Tim 4:10, 16). When Jesus used the word “forsaken,” He was referring to the Father’s judicial separation from Him while He was bearing the punishment for our sins.

In the context of Matthew 27:46, Jesus’ use of *egkataleipō* (aorist, active, indicative) underscores the fact of His experience on the cross. The aorist tense emphasizes that the forsaking was a specific, singular event in time. This was a definitive historical act, occurring during the hours Jesus hung on the cross. The active voice indicates that God the Father was the one who actively forsook Jesus, underscoring that this was a deliberate judicial decision rather than a passive occurrence. The indicative mood confirms that this forsaking was an actual historical event, a factual separation that Jesus experienced. This was not merely an expression of feeling but a declaration of reality.

Theologically, this judicial separation signifies that Jesus, in His humanity, bore the full weight of God’s wrath for sin. The forsaking was part of the punishment that was due for humanity’s sins, which Jesus took upon Himself. This highlights the substitutionary nature of Jesus’ death (Isa 53:6, 10; Mark 10:45; Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 1 Pet 3:18): He was forsaken so that believers will never be forsaken, emphasizing the completeness of His atoning work. Furthermore, Jesus’ cry to the Father was drawn from Psalm 22:1, where David said, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” Whether one understands Psalm 22 as prophetic or Messianic, Allen Ross notes, “what is certain is that Jesus appropriated this psalm to himself in his greatest sufferings, and thereafter

⁷ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 273.

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the evangelists and apostles saw the connections between the psalm and his passion.”⁸ In the context of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus employed these words while being forsaken by the Father. According to Ross, “for Jesus to be abandoned to death by the Father in heaven meant that His death would accomplish our redemption. Or, to put it more precisely, because the Father ‘abandoned’ Him who died in our place, He will never abandon us who have come to faith in Him.”⁹

These words, spoken from Jesus’ humanity (not His deity), indicate that He was alone while being judged by God the Father. This was a judicial act as Jesus bore our sins. John Walvoord states, “God the Father had to turn away as Jesus bore the curse and identified Himself with the sins of the whole world.”¹⁰ William MacDonald states, “Because God is holy, He cannot overlook sin...When God, as Judge, looked down and saw our sins upon the sinless Substitute, He withdrew from the Son of His love.”¹¹ Since Jesus actually bore our sins, it follows that He experienced the same kind death we face: separation from God. Warren Wiersbe states, “It was during the time of darkness that Jesus had been made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). He had been forsaken by the Father! That darkness was a symbol of the judgment that He endured when He was ‘made a curse’ for us (Gal. 3:13).”¹²

Some might argue that Jesus was not actually forsaken but only felt that way while on the cross. Jesus certainly felt forsaken because He was forsaken. Jesus’ feelings agreed with

⁸ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms 1–89: Commentary, vol. 1*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011–2013), 527–528.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 531.

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, 235.

¹¹ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 1309.

¹² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol.,

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the facts of the situation. And He knew exactly why He was forsaken: He was being judged for our sins “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). D. A. Carson states, “It is better to take the words at face value: Jesus is conscious of being abandoned by his Father.”¹³ Jesus’ words must be understood as coming from His humanity and not His deity, for there can be no separation within the Trinity itself. Such a thing is not possible. According to Charles Ryrie, “In that work He had to be forsaken by God, and yet at the same time there was no splitting up of the trinity.”¹⁴ Jesus’ separation from the Father was a judicial act, not one that broke the essence of the trinity.

The abandonment of Jesus in His humanity was temporary. It was only for the three hours as He was bearing our sins on the cross that He experienced judicial separation from God the Father. Previously, Jesus had told His disciples, “I go to the Father” (John 14:28; 16:10, 17), which meant He knew the work on the cross was temporary. And after He’d paid the full price for our sins, He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30a). This meant the temporary suffering of Christ was over, and the payment for our sins had been paid in full. Then, being fully restored to His Father, Jesus said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46). Then Jesus died physically, when “He bowed His head and gave up His spirit” (John 19:30). Afterwards, His body was placed in a grave, and He was resurrected three days later and seen alive by many (1 Cor 15:3-8). Jesus conquered sin and death by means of His death and resurrection.

¹³ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 579.

¹⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Dubuque, IA: ECS Ministries, 2005), 63.

What Jesus Suffered by Man & God

Summary

Scripture reveals Jesus experienced a judicial separation from God the Father for three hours while bearing the punishment for our sins on the cross. This separation was necessary for Jesus to bear our sins sacrificially, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies and typologies that emphasized the need for a sinless substitute to take on the sins of others. Despite bearing our sins, Jesus remained sinless (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). His death on the cross, culminating in His cry “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46), underscores the depth of His sacrifice and the fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan. Jesus’ resurrection three days later demonstrated His victory over sin and death, securing salvation for all who believe in Him. His forsakenness on the cross was a moment of divine judgment, reflecting God’s holiness and justice, yet also revealing His immense love and provision for humanity’s reconciliation with Him (Rom 5:8; 1 Pet 3:18).

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Jesus' suffering and death on the cross has both infinite and eternal value for both God the Father as well as those trust in Christ as their Savior. From the divine perspective, Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), and this because He went to the cross as the Father directed (John 6:38; 8:42; 12:27; cf., Matt 26:39, 42; Heb 10:7). Jesus died in our place (Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3-4), "the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18), and we are redeemed "with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Pet 1:19). Now, the Father is forever satisfied with the payment of Christ on the cross who paid our sin debt in full (Heb 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). There's nothing more to pay. Jesus paid it all! According to Francis Schaeffer, "Christ's death in space-time history is completely adequate to meet our need for refuge from the true moral guilt that we have. It is final because of who He is. He is the infinite second person of the Trinity; therefore, His death has infinite value."¹ Though Jesus suffered for our sins for only a few hours on the cross, His death had infinite and eternal value and saves forever those who trust in Him as Savior. Geisler states, "Being by nature the infinite God, Christ's death had infinite value, even though His suffering and death occurred in a finite amount of time. Time is not a mandatory measure of worth—birth, for instance, happens over a relatively short span but produces something of extraordinary value. One death in limited time achieved something of limitless value for all eternity."² Paul Enns states, "At the heart of orthodox belief is the recognition

¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, Second U.S. edition. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 206.

² Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things*, 403.

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that Christ died a substitutionary death to provide salvation for a lost humanity. If Jesus were only a man He could not have died to save the world, but because of His deity, His death had infinite value whereby He could die for the entire world.”³

As a result of what Christ accomplished, there is great benefit for us who have trusted in Him as our Savior. By His work on the cross, Christians become the recipients of great blessings, both in time and eternity. Though He blesses some Christians materially (1 Tim 6:17-19), His main focus is on giving us spiritual blessings which are far better. Paul wrote that God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). According to Harold Hoehner, “Every spiritual blessing (*eulogia*) refers to every spiritual enrichment needed for the spiritual life. Since these benefits have already been bestowed on believers, they should not ask for them but rather appropriate them by faith.”⁴ Some of the spiritual blessings mentioned in Scripture are as follows:

1. We are the special objects of His love: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8), and “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 4:10).
2. We are forgiven all our sins: “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the

³ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 225.

⁴ Harold W. Hoehner, “Ephesians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 616.

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way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:13-14; cf. Eph 1:7; Heb 10:10-14).

3. We are given eternal life: Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27-28; cf. John 3:16; 6:40; 20:31).
4. We are made alive together with Christ: “God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:4-5).
5. We are raised up and seated with Christ: God “raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).
6. We are the recipients of God’s grace: “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (John 1:16), “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).
7. We are created to perform good works: “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal 6:10), and “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10; cf., Tit 2:11-14).
8. We are given freedom in Christ: “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1), “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13; cf., 1 Pet 2:16).
9. We are given a spiritual gift to serve others: “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving

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- one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet 4:10; cf. Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:11).
10. We are children of God: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are" (1 John 3:1a), "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26).
 11. We are made ambassadors for Christ: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).
 12. We are gifted with God's righteousness: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21), "and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil 3:9; cf. Rom 4:3-5; 5:17).
 13. We are justified before God: "Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus...For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law" (Rom 3:24, 28), and "knowing that a man is 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).
 14. We have peace with God: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1).
 15. We will never be condemned: "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18), "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and

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believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24), "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

16. We are given citizenship in heaven: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).
17. We are transferred to the kingdom of Christ: "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:13; cf. Acts 26:18), and "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Th 2:12).
18. We are all saints in Christ Jesus: we are "saints by calling" (1 Cor 1:2), and "saints in Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:1), and "are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household" (Eph 2:19).
19. We are made priests to God: "He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Rev 1:6).
20. We are God's chosen: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph 1:4), "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col 3:12).
21. We are the recipients of His faithfulness: "He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you'" (Heb 13:5), and even "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim 2:13).
22. We have been called to walk in newness of life: "We have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead

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through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4), and “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love” (Eph 4:1-2).

23. We are members of the Church, the body of Christ: “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom 12:4-5), and “He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22-23; cf. Col 1:18).
24. We are indwelt with the Holy Spirit: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16), “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you” (1 Cor 6:19).
25. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit: “having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13b; cf. 2 Cor 5:5).
26. We are enabled to walk with God: “I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal 5:16), and “Since we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:25).
27. We are empowered to live godly: “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Pet 1:3).
28. We have Scripture to train us in righteousness: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

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29. We are guaranteed a new home in heaven: "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).
30. We are guaranteed resurrection bodies: "I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor 15:51-53).
31. We have special access to God's throne of grace: "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16).
32. We will be glorified in eternity: "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Col 3:4), for Christ "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil 3:21).

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Introduction

Election is a biblical teaching that every serious student of the Bible must consider at some point. It addresses issues related to God's sovereignty and human volition, sin and salvation, justice and mercy, love and faith. Given that election touches upon the infinite and eternal nature of God, it's not surprising that certain aspects of this doctrine transcend human understanding, similar to the biblical doctrines of the Trinity and the Hypostatic Union.¹ God's revelation must be our guide. Though we reason through Scripture, our reasoning ability is limited, and we must learn to live with certain unresolvable theological tensions. According to Norman Geisler, "The mystery of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human free will has challenged the greatest Christian thinkers down through the centuries."² 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

¹ For example, the doctrine of the Hypostatic Union teaches that God the Son added to Himself humanity, forever uniting His divine nature with a perfect sinless human nature, becoming the God-Man (John 1:1, 14, 18; 20:28; Col 2:9; Heb 1:8). He is eternal God (Isa 9:6; John 8:56-58; 17:5), yet He was born of a woman in time and space (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:30-35; Gal 4:4). As God, He is omniscient (Psa 139:1-6), but as a boy, He grew in knowledge (Luke 2:52). As God, He created the universe (Gen 1:1; John 1:3; Col 1:15-16), but as man, He was subject to weakness (Matt 4:2; John 4:6; 19:28). God is immortal and cannot die (1 Tim 1:17; 6:16), but as a human, Jesus could die (Matt 16:21; Rom 5:8). There were times that Jesus operated from His divine nature (Mark 2:5-12; John 8:56-58; 10:30-33), and other times from His human nature (Matt 4:2; Luke 8:22-23; John 19:28). These two natures seem incompatible, yet they cohere within Jesus.

² Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 137.

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of theology alike.”³ Warren Wiersbe states, “The mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility will never be solved in this life. Both are taught in the Bible (John 6:37). Both are true, and both are essential.”⁴ 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.”⁵ When discussing election with others, it’s always best to maintain an attitude of love and grace, as this will generate more light than heat.

Major Views on Election

Regarding election and salvation, there are varying perspectives on the roles of divine intervention and human responsibility in the process of being saved. The major views are as follows:

1. Strict Calvinism adheres closely to the five points of Calvinism summarized by the acronym TULIP. *Total depravity* means people are completely unable to save themselves or even to seek God on their own due to their sinful nature. *Unconditional election* refers to God’s choice of certain individuals for salvation, not based on any foreseen merit or action on their part but purely on His sovereign will. *Limited atonement* means Christ’s death was intended to save only the elect, not all of humanity. *Irresistible grace* means that when God calls the elect to salvation, they cannot resist His will. *Perseverance of the saints* means that

³ Lewis S. Chafer, “Biblical Theism Divine Decrees” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 96 (1939): 268.

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2, 11.

⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 359.

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those whom God has elected and saved will persevere in faith and will not ultimately fall away.

2. Moderate Calvinism adheres to the basic tenets of Calvinism but with some modifications or a softer interpretation. These often hold to a form of unlimited atonement that suggests Christ's atonement is sufficient for all but effective only for the elect. They're also more open to dialogue with other theological perspectives, and tend to avoid the more deterministic implications of strict Calvinism.
3. Calminianism blends elements of Calvinism and Arminianism, seeking a middle ground concerning God's sovereignty and human volition. Calminians tend to lean toward unlimited atonement, resistible grace, God's election based on foreknowledge of who would believe, and the belief that saints can turn to a prolonged sinful lifestyle without losing their salvation.
4. Arminianism is a theological system that emphasizes God's conditional election based on foreknowledge. Arminians see people as corrupted by sin, but able to respond to God's call to salvation. They also adhere to unlimited atonement, resistible grace, and believe Christians are able to forfeit their salvation, which means good works are necessary to retain salvation.
5. Catholicism teaches that salvation is open to all and involves both God's grace and human cooperation. In the Catholic view, both faith and works are essential for salvation. Faith is the foundational response to God's grace, but it must be accompanied by works of love and obedience. In Catholicism, the sacraments are seen as vital means of grace. For instance, baptism is considered necessary for salvation as it washes away original sin and incorporates a person into the body of Christ. The Eucharist, penance, and other sacraments further sustain and deepen a believer's relationship with God.

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6. Pelagianism is a theological perspective considered heretical by most Christian traditions. It emphasizes human free will and denies original sin, teaching people are born morally neutral, and each person can choose to do good or evil without the necessity of divine grace. Pelagians emphasize that salvation can be achieved through human effort and moral striving, and they see God's grace is seen as helpful but not necessary for living a righteous life or achieving salvation.

The above categories are simplified presentations with detailed nuances others might seek to expand and clarify. My purpose in presenting them is to provide a basic construct of the major views. What follows is my understanding of the doctrine of election as it is taught in the Word of God.

God is Sovereign

The Bible reveals God is sovereign over His creation, declaring “The LORD is King forever and ever” (Psa 10:16), and “Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps” (Psa 135:6), and “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4:35). God Himself declares, “My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Isa 46:10b; cf. Psa 33:11), and this because He is the “only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15), Who “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11b). All this is true; however, the Bible also reveals God sovereignly created both angels and people with intellect and volition, and has granted them a modicum of freedom to act as free moral agents. According to McChesney, God's sovereignty “is not to be viewed in any such way as to abridge the reality of the moral freedom of God's responsible

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creatures or to make men anything else than the arbiters of their own eternal destinies. God has seen fit to create beings with the power of choice between good and evil. He rules over them in justice and wisdom and grace.”⁶

At all times, and without external restraint, God remains in constant sovereign control, guiding His creation through history. He interferes in the affairs of mankind, and His unseen hand works behind all their activities, controlling and directing history as He wills. We know from Scripture that God possesses certain immutable attributes and that He never acts inconsistently with His nature. For example, because God is righteous, all His actions and commands are just. Because God is immutable, His moral perfections never change. Because God is eternal, He is righteous forever. Because God is omniscient, His righteous acts are always predicated on perfect knowledge. Because God is omnipotent, He is always able to execute His righteous will. And because God is love, His judgments can be merciful toward the undeserving and humble.

The Bible Affirms God’s Sovereignty & Human Volition

Shortly after God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1), He sovereignly chose to create mankind in His image (Gen 1:26) as finite analogues to Himself, endowed with intellectual and volitional capabilities. God’s intention was that they would function as theocratic administrators to “rule” over His creation (Gen 1:26-28). When God made His decision to create people in His image, He willingly limited Himself to allow them the freedom to operate as responsible moral creatures and not mere automatons. This self-imposed restraint by God is not unusual, for He has restrained Himself

⁶ E. McChesney, “Sovereignty of God,” ed. Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 1214.

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in other ways. For example, every time God made a promise or covenant, He bound Himself to His Word such that He cannot do otherwise. Scripture reveals that “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Num 23:19). This is why, even though “we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim 2:13), and “it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb 6:18; cf., Tit 1:2).

God has given people volition and freedom to act, and He holds them accountable for their actions. As the Sovereign of the universe, God will judge everyone fairly, for “there is no partiality with God” (Rom 2:11). Peter said, “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him” (Acts 10:34-35). And Paul wrote, “For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality” (Col 3:25).

Though all mankind is fallen, being corrupted because of their sinful flesh (Rom 5:12, 6:6; 7:19-23; Gal 5:17, 19; Col 3:9), they still retain the image of God and the ability to function intellectually and volitionally (Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jam 3:9). This means that mankind is able, in a limited way, to understand God’s general and special revelation, and to respond volitionally if they choose (Psa 19:1-2; Rom 1:18-32).

Election

Election derives from the Greek verb *eklegō* (ἐκλέγω) which, according to BDAG, means “to make a choice in accordance with significant preference, select someone or

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something for oneself.”⁷ According to Norman Geisler, “The word election (or *elect*) occurs fourteen times in the New Testament. An elect person is a chosen one; election (or *elect*) is used of Israel (Rom 9:11; 11:28), of angels (1 Tim 5:21), and of believers. In relation to believers, election is the decision of God from all eternity whereby He chose those who would be saved.”⁸ Geisler further states, “The words *chosen* and *chose* are used numerous times. The terms are employed of Christ (Luke 23:35; 1 Pet 1:20; 2:4, 6), of a disciple (Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; 22:14; John 15:10), and even of Judas (John 6:70; 13:18), who was chosen to be an apostle. Soteriologically, a chosen one is a person elected to salvation by God.”⁹

Election is that free choice of God from eternity past in which He chose to save and bless some (Eph 1:4-5). The elect are the ones chosen. God elects groups (Luke 6:13-16; John 6:70) and individuals (1 Ch 28:5; Acts 9:15). Election is to salvation (Acts 13:48; Eph 1:4-6; 2 Th 2:13), spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3), holy and righteous living (Col 3:12; 1 Pet 2:9), and service for the Lord (Jer 1:4-5; Gal 1:15-16; cf. Acts 9:15). In election, God is sovereign and people are free. Both are true. This is why Jesus said, “**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37). Here we observe the coalescence of God’s sovereignty and positive human volition as the Father *gives* and people *come* of their own choice.¹⁰ We

⁷ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 305.

⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 220–221.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁰ Other passages that emphasize God’s sovereign choice: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44), and “no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father” (John 6:65). Paul wrote,

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observe something similar in Acts where Luke wrote, “When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). Here we observe Gentiles who were *appointed to eternal life*, and that they personally exercised their volition and *believed* in the Lord for salvation.¹¹ Robert B. Thieme Jr., states:

[Election is] the recognition by God, before the foundation of the world, of those who would believe in Christ; the sovereign act of God in eternity past to choose, to set apart, certain members of the human race for privilege, based on His knowledge of every person’s freewill decisions in time. While God is sovereign, having the right to do with His creatures as He pleases, never has He hindered or tampered with human free will. He did not choose some to be saved and others to be condemned. Instead, in eternity past,

“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will” (Eph 1:4-5). And to Christians living in Thessalonica, Paul wrote, “We should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Th 2:13).

¹¹ Romans 9:1-18 is often cited when discussing election to salvation; however, when one looks at the context of Roman 9, it does not pertain to salvation, but to God’s selection of the progenitors of the nation of Israel. In a similar way, God sovereignly selected Nebuchadnezzar to be the king over Babylon (Dan 2:37-38; 5:18), and Cyrus as king over Persia (Ezra 1:2). In fact, God’s sovereignty is supreme when it comes to selecting all human rulers, for “It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings” (Dan 2:21), and “the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men” (Dan 4:17). At times, He even raises up young foolish kings to discipline His people, as He told Isaiah the prophet, “I will make mere lads their princes, and capricious children will rule over them” (Isa 3:4).

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God first chose to accomplish the work of man's salvation through the Son. Then, He looked down the corridors of time and elected for salvation everyone He knew would believe in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:4). God elected believers in the sense that He knew ahead of time that their free will would choose for Christ....Moreover, God did not elect anyone to hell: unbelievers are condemned to eternally reside in hell only because they have used their volition toward unbelief (John 3:18).¹²

Predestined by God

When writing to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul said, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will" (Eph 1:4-5). The word *predestined* translates the Greek word *proorizō* (προορίζω), which means, to "decide upon beforehand, predetermine."¹³ Harold Hoehner defines the word similarly as, "to determine beforehand, mark out beforehand, predestine."¹⁴ Geisler notes, "Just as God predetermined from all eternity that Christ would die for our sins (Acts 2:23), He also predestined who would be saved. As Paul says, 'Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son' (Rom 8:29)."¹⁵ According to Paul Enns, "Even though election and predestination are clearly taught in

¹² Robert B. Thieme, Jr. "Election", *Thieme's Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 81.

¹³ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 873.

¹⁴ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 193.

¹⁵ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 221.

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Scripture, man is still held accountable for his choices. Scripture never suggests that man is lost because he is not elect or has not been predestined; the emphasis of Scripture is that man is lost because he refuses to believe the gospel.”¹⁶

Predestination refers to what God purposes for us. The Bible reveals that God has predestined us to adoption as His children (Eph 1:5), to our ultimate conformity to Christ (Rom 8:29–30), and to the blessings of our future inheritance (Eph 1:11). Warren Wiersbe states, “This word, as it is used in the Bible, refers primarily to what God does for saved people. Nowhere in the Bible are we taught that people are predestined to hell, because this word refers only to God’s people. Election seems to refer to people, while predestination refers to purposes.”¹⁷ According to Robert B. Thieme Jr., predestination refers to “God’s predetermined, sovereign provisioning of every believer for the purpose of executing His plan, purpose, and will in time (Eph 1:4-6, 11).”¹⁸ Thieme further states:

In eternity past God decreed, or established with certainty, the believer’s destiny for time and eternity. However, the divine act of predestination is never to be confused with the ideas of kismet [the idea of fate] or any other human-viewpoint system of fatalism. God did not negate free will or force anyone into a course of action. Rather, He only decreed and provisioned what He knew would actually happen. He predestined believers based on His eternal knowledge that they would, by their own free will, accept Jesus Christ as

¹⁶ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 329.

¹⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2, 11.

¹⁸ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Predestination”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 203.

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Savior. Long before human history began, sovereign God determined that every Church Age believer would be united with the resurrected Jesus Christ, the King of kings. Those who believe are predestined as heirs of God and joint heirs with the Son of God—sharing the eternal destiny of Jesus Christ Himself (Eph 1:5). Furthermore, God predestined believers with everything necessary to fulfill His plan in time. No Christian is dependent upon human energy, personality, or human effort, because God established a grace way of life and furnished the divine means of execution (2 Tim 1:9). Every believer in this age has equal opportunity to either accept or reject God’s predestined provision. Regardless of personal failure or success in time, all believers are predestined to be completely “conformed to the image of His Son” in resurrection bodies in heaven (Rom 8:29).¹⁹

Foreknowledge

Peter wrote of God’s elect as those “who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet 1:1-2). Here, the word *foreknowledge* translates the Greek noun *prognōsis* (πρόγνωσις), which means “to know beforehand, know in advance”²⁰ Foreknowledge simply means that omniscient God, from eternity past, knew in advance all that would happen in time and space, and He knew the actions of every person and whether they would be saved or not. Jesus communicated His foreknowledge when He said to His disciples, “‘There are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him” (John 6:64).

¹⁹ Ibid., 203-204

²⁰ Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 138.

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God also knew His own actions in time and space, either to direct, permit, or overrule human or angelic decisions, and to judge everyone fairly for their actions. According to Norman Geisler:

Being omniscient, God also eternally foreknew those who would be saved: “Those God foreknew he also predestined” (Rom 8:29). Indeed, they were “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet 1:2). Since His foreknowledge is infallible (He is omniscient), whatever God foreknows will indeed come to pass. Hence, His foreknowledge of who would be saved assures that they will be.²¹

In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29). The word “foreknew” translates the Greek verb *proginōskō* (προγινώσκω) which, according to BDAG, means “to know beforehand or in advance, have foreknowledge.”²² Here, the word connotes God’s knowing people in an intimate sense and not merely what they will do. This speaks to the richness of the relationship God has with each individual. Though we exist in time and space and live our lives in a chronological manner with one experience sequentially following the next, God exists in the eternal realm, beyond time and space, in the eternal now. This means that God is present at all times and places in human history simultaneously. Scripture speaks of what God foreknew from eternity past as it relates to the choices of His elect, but His foreknowledge is not detached or impersonal; rather, it is intimately connected to the formation

²¹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 221.

²² William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 866.

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of His family and the execution of His purposes in the world (see Jer 1:4-5).

Prevenient Grace

Prevenient grace refers to the grace of God that precedes and prepares a person's heart and will for salvation. The term "prevenient" means "preceding" or "coming before." According to Geisler, "Prevenient means 'before,' and prevenient grace refers to God's unmerited work in the human heart prior to salvation, which directs people to this end through Christ...This grace is also seen in the fact that 'the goodness of God leads you to repentance' (Rom 2:4). Thus, prevenient grace is God's grace exerted on our behalf even before He bestows salvation on us."²³

Because God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4), and is "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9), He works in a preparatory manner to convince the fallen human heart to welcome Christ (2 Tim 1:9). Jesus spoke of the role of the Holy Spirit in the dispensation of the church age, saying, "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me" (John 16:8-9). According to Geisler, "The act of convicting, then, is that by which God persuades a person that he is a sinner and, thus, is in need of the Savior."²⁴ This prevenient work of God is necessary because of the sinfulness of mankind. It is not considered to be salvific in itself but rather a preparatory grace that allows individuals to cooperate with God's saving work in Christ. In this perspective, salvation is seen as a cooperative

²³ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 222.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

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process where individuals have the ability to accept or reject God's offer of grace.

Christians are Elect in Christ

From eternity past, God intended for His grand plan of salvation for all humanity to be achieved through His Son. Scripture reveals “the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14), and “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), and He is “the Lamb who has been slain” from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8). Jesus is the Father's Chosen One. God said, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; **My chosen One** in whom My soul delights” (Isa 42:1). And He said of Jesus, “This is My Son, **My Chosen One**” (Luke 9:35). And Peter describes Jesus as “**chosen** and precious in the sight of God” (1 Pet 2:4). Jesus was chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be the Savior of all mankind, and Christians are elect because we are *in Christ*. Geisler states:

Christ is eternal, and the universal church was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4); hence, in the mind of God, the church of God is eternal. Further, Christ is the elect of God (Matt 3:16–17), and we are elect in Him; not only is Christ the elect One, but in the New Testament those “in Christ,” the church, the members of His body, were elect in Him before time began.²⁵

Scripture reveals that Christians “are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet 1:1-2), that Christ “was foreknown before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet 1:20), was “chosen and precious” in His sight (1 Pet 2:4),

²⁵ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things*, 50–51.

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and that God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). The prepositional phrase “in Him” (ἐν αὐτῷ) speaks to our election and union with Christ (Eph 1:4). According to L. B. Smedes, “This strongly suggests that God elects people for salvation in the same decision that He elected Christ as their Savior.”²⁶ Because Jesus is God’s Chosen One, it is asserted that we, God’s elect, were chosen at the same time as Christ, and He “**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). When we believed in Jesus as our Savior, God placed us into union with Christ, for “by His doing you are **in Christ Jesus**” (1 Cor 1:30). Paul wrote, “I endure all things for the sake of those who are **chosen** [εκλεκτος], so that they also may obtain **the salvation which is in Christ Jesus** and with it eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

The prepositional phrase, “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ), emphasizes the idea of believers being in union with Christ. This union is not merely a metaphorical expression but signifies a profound spiritual reality. The Apostle Paul frequently uses this expression to convey the intimate and transformative relationship that believers have with Christ (Rom 8:1; 12:5; 1 Cor 1:2, 30; Gal 3:28; Eph 1:3-4; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; 2 Tim 1:9; 2:10). Being “in Christ” signifies that believers are, in a real spiritual sense, united with Him. This identification includes sharing in His death, burial, and resurrection, for we have been “crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20), and “we died with Christ” (Rom 6:8), were “buried with Him” (Rom 6:4), and “have been raised up with Christ” (Col 3:1). In a real way, we were with Him on the cross, in the grave, and at His resurrection. In the eyes of God, His

²⁶ L. B. Smedes, “Grace,” ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 551.

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experience has become our experience. This identification with Jesus is real, even though we were not physically alive at the time of His crucifixion, burial, resurrection, or ascension into heaven. Furthermore, “In Him we have...forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph 1:7), “have been sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2), have “eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23), and are told there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). This kind of identification *in* and *with* another is true in other instances. For example, it was said of Rebekah, “Two nations are in your womb” (Gen 25:23), even before Israel was called into being as a nation. Similarly, the writer of Hebrews speaks of Levi who “paid tithes” (Heb 7:9), and this while “he was still in the loins of his father” Abraham (Heb 7:10). This means that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek, even before he existed, as he was in the loins of his father, Abraham.²⁷

Furthermore, being “in Christ” reflects a believer’s new position before God. It signifies that, through faith in Christ, believers are accepted and justified before God. Their sins are forgiven (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), and they are seen through the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). The phrase also emphasizes that believers participate in the benefits of Christ’s redemptive work. This includes reconciliation with God (Rom 5:10), adoption as children (Gal

²⁷ These two analogies with Rebekah and Levi help convey the idea of a connection or representation that transcends mere physical existence. In the case of Rebekah, the passage refers to the statement, “Two nations are in your womb” (Gen 25:23), highlighting that this declaration occurred before Israel was called into being as a nation. This serves as an example of a connection that existed before the actual historical formation of the nation. Likewise, the reference to Levi paying tithes while still in the loins of his father, Abraham (Heb 7:9-10), is another analogy used to illustrate a connection that goes beyond the immediate physical existence of the individual. It suggests a representation or identification that precedes the individual’s own existence.

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4:5; Eph 1:5), the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16), and the status of being a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Believers are seen as co-heirs with Christ, sharing in the inheritance of eternal life (Eph 1:3-14; Rom 8:17). This positional truth is foundational to the concept of salvation by grace through faith. While being “in Christ” has personal implications, it also has a corporate dimension. It speaks to the collective identity of the Church as the body of Christ, with believers being interconnected and sharing a common life “in Christ.” Robert B. Thieme Jr., states:

Through the baptism of the Spirit at salvation, every believer of this age is removed from his position in Adam and secured in his position “in Christ” (1 Cor 15:22; Eph 2:5–6; cf. Gal 3:27). The believer, no longer spiritually dead, is made a “new creature” with a totally unprecedented relationship with God (2 Cor 5:17a). The “old things” that once kept him alienated from God have passed away; phenomenal “new things” have come by virtue of his position in Christ (2 Cor 5:17b). The believer shares Christ’s eternal life (1 John 5:11–12), His righteousness (2 Cor 5:21), His election (Eph 1:3–4), His destiny (Eph 1:5), His sonship (John 1:12; Gal 3:26; 1 John 3:1–2), His heirship (Rom 8:16–17), His sanctification (1 Cor 1:2, 30), His kingdom (2 Pet 1:11), His priesthood (Heb 10:10–14), and His royalty (2 Tim 2:11–12). This new position can never be forfeited.²⁸

In summary, the prepositional phrase “in Christ” encapsulates profound theological truths about the believer’s union with Christ, identification with His redemptive work, a new positional standing before God, and the communal

²⁸ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Position in Christ”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 200.

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identity of the Church as the body of Christ. It serves as a key concept in understanding the richness of Christian salvation and the transformative impact of faith in Jesus Christ.

God's Sovereignty and Human Volition at the Cross

One can see God's sovereignty and human volition working simultaneously at the crucifixion of Jesus. In the sovereignty and wisdom of God, without overruling human volition, the Lord accomplished His will by means of the wills of wicked men who sought to oppose Him. Luke tells us, "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (Acts 2:23). Here, wicked men did their worst against God and His Messiah, and yet, what was done to the Messiah, was done "by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God." Luke states something similar when he recorded Peter's prayer to God, saying, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur" (Acts 4:27-28). These wicked men were "were gathered together against" Jesus, to oppose and crucify Him. Yet Peter says to God they did "whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." These wicked men—whose pride and power were threatened by Jesus—sought to destroy Him by means of false witnesses and illegal trials, and to put Him to death in the most horrible way possible; crucifixion. But God is sovereign, and by means of His invisible hand, used the very actions of those who opposed Him to accomplish the thing He desired; the death of Messiah for everyone. Here is a mystery that brings awe and bewilderment, as the wills of wicked men became the vehicle of divine destiny to produce exactly what God intended. God was in no way the author of their sin. Those who crucified Messiah acted freely. Yet their free actions were the modus

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operandi to accomplish His will, and so Messiah was crucified and bore the sins of those who placed Him on the cross.

Human Choice to Believe

God is sovereign, and He created people with volition, which is the ability to choose. One should not seek to press sovereignty or free will to an extreme. Arnold Fruchtenbaum correctly notes, “if one goes too far with sovereignty, he ends up teaching that there is absolutely no free will. He would teach that people are saved whether they willed it or did not will it. Some of the elect are dragged into the Kingdom kicking and screaming. That has gone over to the sovereignty extreme.”²⁹ In Scripture, we observe clear statements where people are called to exercise their volition and personally trust in Christ as Savior (John 3:16-18; Acts 16:30-31; Rom 10:12-15; Eph 2:8-9). Fruchtenbaum continues:

On the other side of the coin is human responsibility, where the Bible also just as clearly teaches that people are individually responsible for their moral choices. They are somehow responsible for their eternal destinies. Whether they end up in the Lake of Fire or the New Jerusalem, that is somehow relevant to the choice they make. Throughout the Bible, God calls upon people to make a choice. Joshua declared to the people of Israel, in the closing days of his life, *Choose you this day whom ye will serve* (Josh 24:15). It is obvious that the Israelites were able to make some kind of a choice and were challenged to make it. Thus we have this same concept of human responsibility. Even when we have statements in the Bible about God

²⁹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *God's Will & Man's Will: Predestination, Election, & Free Will*, ed. Christiane Jurik, 2nd Edition. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2014), 2.

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hardening the hearts of certain ones, like the heart of Pharaoh, it also indicates in the same context that somewhere along the line Pharaoh also hardened his own heart. We believe God holds us morally responsible for the choices we make, and He expects us to make moral decisions. If we are not able to make any moral decision, if we really do not have such a will, it is inconsistent for God to hold us responsible for choosing things that He Himself predestined us to choose. Yet the Bible constantly exhorts us to believe, and in becoming believers, the Bible exhorts us to live godly lives. The Bible holds us responsible for the choices we make, either as unbelievers or as believers. If there is no real free choice of some kind, then how could God justly reward us or punish us for the choices we make?³⁰

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 (John 3:16; Acts 4:12; 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). According to Robert Lightner, "God the Father is sovereign. He must be to be God. Human responsibility is just as biblical as divine sovereignty. Jesus stressed both. Jesus said no one can come to him unless drawn by the Father but he also said none who come to him would be cast out (John 6:37)."³¹

There are a number of passages that emphasize negative human volition as the reason people reject Jesus.

³⁰ Ibid., 3-4.

³¹ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 191.

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Concerning unbelieving Israel, Jesus said, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and **you were unwilling**” (Matt 23:37). The Bible teaches that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4), and that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Tit 2:11), and the Lord is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). If someone perishes eternally, it is because they failed to respond to God and His drawing them to Himself. Jesus said that one is judged eternally, “**because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God**” (John 3:18b). And when speaking to unbelievers, Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and **you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life**” (John 5:39-40). Stephen, when about to be stoned to death, said to his attackers, “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are **always resisting the Holy Spirit**; you are doing just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51). All who end up in the lake of fire are there by personal choice and not because God failed to love them or make provision for their eternal salvation. According to Lewis Chafer, “If men go to perdition it will be because every possible mercy from God has been resisted.”³²

The spiritual condition of unbelievers is that they made the choice not to believe. Also, Satan imposes spiritual blindness upon them. As Paul wrote, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving

³² Lewis S. Chafer, *Salvation* (Philadelphia, PA: Sunday School Times Company, 1922), 40.

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so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:3-4).

God saves everyone who is positive to Him and believes in Christ as their Savior (John 3:15-16, 18, 36; 5:24, 39-40; 6:47; 20:31; Rom 3:28; 4:3-5; 5:1-2; 1 Cor 1:21; 15:1-4; Gal 2:16; 3:26; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 3:9; 1 John 5:10-13), and condemns forever those who are negative to Him, who suppress His truth in unrighteousness (John 3:19; 12:37; Rom 1:18-32), and who reject His offer of eternal life, leaving them to suffer for their own choices (John 3:18; 5:39-40). This means God sovereignly chooses to elect those who believe in Christ as their Savior.

What About Children who Die Before Reaching the Age of Accountability?

What about babies and little children? Are they among God’s elect? Do they go directly to heaven when they die? Yes. All babies and little children go to heaven if they die before reaching the age of accountability. Concerning this doctrine, Robert B. Thieme Jr., states:

Age of Accountability - The point in life when an individual is capable of recognizing the existence of a Supreme Being, capable of understanding the Gospel, and responsible for his own decision toward a relationship with God. This is also called the point of God-consciousness. Scripture is clear that God makes His existence evident within the world (Rom 1:19-20). Accountability is reached when, through simple thought and reasoning, a person can consider that existence and draw conclusions. The specific age at which this occurs varies among individuals and depends on several factors, including geographical location, social conditions, education, and individual mental capacity...Individuals who die before reaching

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accountability, including infants and the severely mentally handicapped, are taken directly into the presence of the Lord (2 Sam 12:22-23). In grace, God automatically saves anyone who lacks the mental ability to reach God-consciousness and make a responsible decision about Christ.³³

The age of accountability is a theological extrapolation that is born out of certain passages of Scripture. For example, Moses wrote of “little ones... have no knowledge of good or evil” (Deut 1:39). And God spoke of Isaiah’s son, Shear-jashub (Isa 7:3), that “before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you [Ahaz] dread will be forsaken” (Isa 7:16). According to Norman Geisler, “These texts seem to imply that there is an age of moral accountability. Even of adults, Jesus said, ‘If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains’ (John 9:41). How much more would this apply to infants who cannot yet know right from wrong.”³⁴ Another revealing passage is found in 2 Chronicles where we’re told, “Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem, and he did evil in the sight of the LORD” (2 Ch 36:9). Here we see an eight year old whose actions were called “evil in the sight of the LORD.” It reveals that an eight year old with normal cognitive function could be held morally responsible for his actions before the Lord.

Moral accountability before God seems to assume normal sensory and cognitive function, such that a person who has the sensory and intellectual capacity to know that God

³³ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Age of Accountability”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 4.

³⁴ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 448.

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exists through creation (Psa 19:1-2; Rom 1:18), can then make a decision to pursue Him, or to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). It would seem that those who suffer from an intellectual or developmental disability (i.e., Down syndrome, severe autism, etc.) are granted a special dispensation concerning their moral accountability before God, and they are granted free access to heaven. The command to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation presupposes intelligence and the ability to exercise one’s volition. Children and those who are mentally disabled lack the intellectual and volitional capacity to make a decision for or against Christ; therefore, they are not made accountable for sin. Robert Lightner states:

In the Bible, infants, little children, and others who cannot believe are neither told to believe nor expected to do so. They are not classified as wicked evildoers and rejecters of God’s grace. It is always adults who are addressed, either directly or indirectly, regarding these matters. Because the Bible has so much to say about those who cannot believe and yet says nothing about their being eternally separated from God because of their inability, we conclude that they have heaven as their home. They die safely in the arms of Jesus.³⁵

An often-cited biblical passage on this matter is found in the life of King David who lost a newborn son as a result of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. David was guilty of horrible sin, but he had a sensitive heart and was very concerned for his child. After the death of David’s son, he said, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows, the LORD may be

³⁵ Robert Lightner, *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Kregel Publications, 2000), 15-16.

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gracious to me, that the child may live.’ But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Sam 12:22-23). While the child was alive, David prayed to God to be gracious “that the child may live.” However, after the child died, David expressed optimism by saying “I will go to him, but he will not return to me.” David was thinking of heaven, where he knew his infant son had gone. Concerning this passage, Robert Lightner states:

Life after death was a certainty for David. That he would be with his son again in the future was his firm belief. He never doubted that fact for a moment. David was rightly related to the Lord, and he did not question that he would spend eternity with Him. Nor did he have any doubt that his infant son, taken in death before he could decide for or against his father’s God, would be there also. Some people argue that David’s declaration meant merely that he would one day join his son in death. As the child had died, so would the father in due time. But such a view does not account for the anticipated reunion and fellowship with his son that is strongly implied in the statement and in the context. David’s act of worship in the house of the Lord is inexplicable if the death of his son merely reminded David of his own certain death.³⁶

That heaven welcomes little children is stated in Jesus’s Words, when He told His disciples, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14; cf., Matt 18:3). John Walvoord notes, “The case of those who die before reaching the age of responsibility is a different problem. The proper doctrine seems to be that infants are regenerated at the

³⁶ Ibid., 55.

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moment of their death, not before, and if they live to maturity, they are regenerated at the moment they accept Christ.”³⁷

Summary of Election:

In summary, God’s election is a sovereign act from eternity past and is predicated on love and grace (Eph 1:3-6), and not on any foresight of worth or good works (Deut 7:7-8; 1 Cor 1:26-31; Rom 9:9-16). God elects based on His foreknowledge, as Peter states, we are “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet 1:1-2), and the elect are saved through the preaching of a gospel message (Rom 10:14-17), and believing in Christ as their Savior (John 3:16; Acts 4:12; 16:31). The basis for condemnation is always a person’s unbelief (John 3:18; 5:39-40; Eph 2:3), as it is negative human volition that keeps people from coming to Christ (1 Tim 2:4; 4:10; John 5:40; Acts 7:51). Election is not merely to salvation, but to a holy and righteous life that honors the Lord (Col 3:12; 2 Th 2:13; 1 Pet 2:9). Election agrees with unlimited atonement (John 1:29; 3:16–17; Heb 2:9; 1 John 2:2), and produces humility because it reveals that salvation is completely of the Lord and that people have nothing to boast about (Rom 4:2; Eph 2:9), and God preserves eternally those who are saved (John 10:28-29). Lastly, babies and little children are not held accountable for their actions, as they do not know right or wrong (Deut 1:39; Isa 7:16), and are counted among God’s elect and enter heaven when they die, for, as Jesus said, “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14; cf. 2 Sam 12:22-23).

³⁷ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 135.

The Free Gift of God is Eternal Life

The Free Gift of God is Eternal Life

The gospel is the good news that addresses the bad news of human sinfulness and separation from a holy God. Despite our helplessness and deserving of eternal punishment, God's solution is the gospel of grace, which reveals Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself, died, was buried, and resurrected on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4). At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness required, and pardons the sinner as His love desires. Salvation from eternal damnation is a free gift offered to all who trust in Christ alone, which emphasizes God's infinite grace rather than our human effort. This ultimate gift, paid for by Jesus's sacrifice, underscores the Bible's message that "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23), highlighting God's generosity and the completeness of Christ's work on the cross.

God is Holy

The Bible reveals God is holy. God declares of Himself, "I am holy" (Lev 11:44), the psalmist says, "holy is the LORD our God" (Psa 99:9), and the Seraphim declare, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts" (Isa 6:3). In her prayer, Hannah said, "There is no one holy like the LORD" (1 Sam 2:2). In these verses, the word "holy" translates the Hebrew word *qadōsh* (קָדוֹשׁ), which, according to James Swanson, refers "to being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities."¹ God's holiness is closely linked with His righteousness, justice, and perfection. Holiness denotes moral purity. J. Carl Laney states, "When we say 'God is holy,' we mean He is totally separated from all that is unholy, defiling, or contrary to His nature. God's holiness is

¹ James Swanson, "קָדוֹשׁ", *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

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unique and distinctive in that it is without any contamination or impurity.”² Because God is absolutely holy, it is written, “no evil dwells with You” (Psa 5:4), “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Hab 1:13), and “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Evil is any thought, word, or act that is contrary to the character and will of God. According to Merrill F. Unger, moral evil “is the failure of rational and free beings to conform in character and conduct to the will of God.”³ George Howley states, “God is separate from all evil and is in no way responsible for it...[and] It can only be attributed to the abuse of free-will on the part of created beings, angelic and human.”⁴ Evil originates in the heart (Gen 6:5; Zech 8:17), is part of our nature (Matt 7:11), and results in evil actions (Neh 13:17; Prov 24:8; 1 Pet 3:12).⁵ According to Scripture, “the LORD is righteous and He loves righteousness” (Psa 11:7). There is a time when “He is coming to judge the earth; and He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness” (Psa 96:13), and He will “judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim 4:1).

Everyone is a Sinner

Sin is the failure to conform to God’s perfect righteousness. Scripture reveals we are sinners “in Adam”

² J. Carl Laney Jr., “God is Holy”, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 188.

³ Merrill Frederick Unger, “Evil” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 382.

⁴ George Howley, “Evil,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 349.

⁵ To be evil means we conform ourselves to Satan’s world-system (1 John 2:15-16), and that we, by default, are self-centered and not God-centered. To be righteous means we are conformed to God’s character and will, both in a salvific and sanctified way.

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(Rom 5:12-13; 1 Cor 15:21-22), sinners by nature (Psa 51:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 7:14-25; 13:12-14), sinners by choice (Eccl 7:20; Isa 59:2; Jam 1:14-15; 1 John 1:8, 10), born as “sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2), and are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). The Bible reveals “there is no one who does not sin” (1 Ki 8:46), and “there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins” (Eccl 7:20). Isaiah wrote, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isa 53:6a). Paul stated that we “are all under sin” (Rom 3:9), and “there is none righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10), for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). James wrote, “we all stumble in many ways” (Jam 3:2a), and John declared, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8, 10). This means everyone stands guilty before God.

Good Works Do Not Save

Good works have no saving merit before God. Isaiah wrote, “all of us have become like one who is unclean, and **all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment**” (Isa 64:6a). Paul wrote, “a man is **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 “saved us and called us with a holy calling, **not according to our works**” (2 Tim 1:9), and “He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness**” (Tit 3:5a). Though human good works may have value in the sight of other people, they have absolutely no saving merit in God’s sight. None at all!

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The Solution of the Cross

We are helpless to save ourselves, but God made a way, and this because He loves us and desires our salvation. He loves us so much that He sent His Son into the world to pay the sin debt we cannot pay. We're told, "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). Nearly 2,000 years ago, God the Father sent God the Son into the world to take upon Himself humanity (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:30-35; John 1:1; 14; Heb 10:5), to be free from sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5) and to live a perfectly righteous life. Jesus said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38; cf., John 7:29; 8:29; Gal 4:4). Jesus was sent by the Father to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), 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).

Jesus willingly went to the cross and paid our sin-debt (John 10:18). His death was a penal substitutionary sacrifice for us, as the Son of Man came "**to give His life a ransom for many**" (Mark 10:45). Paul wrote, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us**" (Rom 5:8). Peter said, "**Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust**, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). His death on the cross was for all sins for all time, for "the death that He died, He died to sin once for all" (Rom 6:10), He "offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (Heb 10:12), and "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Because of Jesus' death on the cross, God "canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of

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the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:14). There’s nothing for us to add to Jesus’ work on the cross. Having paid our sin debt in full on the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30), and then He died.

After Jesus died for our sins, He was buried in a grave, and raised on the third day, as Scripture reveals (1 Cor 15:3-4). And “Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again” (Rom 6:9). After Jesus’s resurrection, He was seen alive by hundreds of people (1 Cor 15:5-8), and those eye witnesses provided a written record of what they saw and heard (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; 2 Pet 1:16-18). God’s offer of salvation is available for everyone. The Bible speaks of “God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:3b-4), who has brought “salvation to all men” (Tit 2:11), and is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).

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. If someone perishes eternally, it is because they failed to respond to God and His drawing them to Himself (John 3:18; 5:39-40; Acts 7:51). All who end up in the lake of fire are there by personal choice, not because God failed to love them or make provision for their eternal salvation.

Once we hear the good news about what Christ accomplished for us, we are asked to place our faith in Him, to “Believe in the Lord Jesus” for salvation (Acts 16:31). Jesus is the object of our faith. To believe in Christ as our Savior means we trust Him to accomplish for us what we cannot accomplish ourselves: eternal salvation from the lake of fire. Faith in Christ is the only condition for salvation. Faith does

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not save. Christ saves. Faith is merely the instrument by which we receive the gift of God. Only the empty hand of faith accepts the gift. It offers nothing, but is open to receive that which is offered by another. No payment is required by us to receive it. Christ alone saves. No one else can save us, including ourselves.

Salvation is a Free Gift from God

Salvation is a gift from the Lord. It is the most precious gift ever offered. And though the gift was very expensive to God, it is absolutely free to us. The precious gift of our salvation was paid in full by the Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins, who hung between heaven and earth and paid our sin-debt. According to God's Word, "**the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**" (Rom 6:23). The words "free gift" translate the Geek noun *charisma* (χάρισμα) which, according to BDAG, refers to "that which is freely and graciously given, favor bestowed, gift."⁶ And Joseph Thayer defines it as "a gift of grace; a favor which one receives without any merit of his own."⁷ Paul, when writing to the Christians at Ephesus, said, "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; cf., Rom 4:4-5; Tit 3:5). To say we are saved by grace means our salvation is unearned and undeserved in any way. God's gift of salvation is totally apart from any good works we may produce, and since good works do not save, bad works cannot unsave (though they can bring divine discipline). A gift focuses on the graciousness of the giver, whereas a reward

⁶ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1081.

⁷ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 667.

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focuses on the work of the recipient. Salvation is NOT a reward for work we've accomplished; rather, it is a free gift from God and based totally on the finished work of Christ. We pay nothing. Jesus paid it all.

The realization that salvation is offered freely, based solely on the perfect work of Jesus on the cross, offers profound relief to the person who has been laboring under the yoke of a works-based system. Those who operate under a works-based system of salvation will never reach a place of certainty in their relationship with God, for they will never know whether they have done enough to gain entrance into heaven. But the truth that salvation is a grace-gift from God, received by faith alone, liberates those who accept it. When properly grasped, God's gospel of grace alleviates the pressure to perform and the fear of falling short and brings a deep sense of peace and joy, knowing our salvation is secure, not because of our own efforts, but because of Christ's finished work. Peace comes when we look to Christ and the promises of Scripture and not ourselves. This gospel of grace message transforms our relationship with God from one of fear and striving to one of gratitude and love, as the focus moves from what we must do to what Christ has already done on our behalf. This grace-based approach encourages us to live out our faith from a place of thankfulness rather than obligation, resulting in a more authentic and joyful Christian life.

The Benefits of the Cross

At the moment of faith in Christ, the benefits of the cross are applied to us. Scripture reveals we are forgiven all our sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), given "eternal life" (John 5:24; 10:28; Rom 6:23), the "gift of righteousness" (Rom 5:17; Phil 3:9), have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1), become "children of God" (John 1:12; Gal 3:26), are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption

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which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24), are “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:13), and are blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). Furthermore, as Christians, we are among those “whose names are in the book of life” (Phil 4:3). As a result, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). We will never experience the lake of fire. Never. As Christians, “our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20).

Good Works Should Follow Salvation

To be eternally saved, the only condition is faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:16; 20:31; Acts 4:14; 16:31). That’s all. Once saved and justified in God’s sight, the Lord expects us to submit to Him in total obedience in all areas of life (Matt 28:20; Rom 12:1-2; Jam 4:7), and to learn His Word in order to live His will in every particular (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2).

After salvation-justification, the Lord directs us to begin a lifelong journey of faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), and to “press on to maturity” (Heb 6:1). This glorifies God, edifies others, and results in the best life possible in this world. Good works is what God expects of His people. Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). Paul wrote, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10). The Lord instructs us “to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Tit 2:12) and to be “zealous for good deeds” (Tit 2:14). We agree with Paul who wrote, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal 6:10). God

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clearly calls His people to a life of obedience and good works. There is no question about this. The Scriptures are plain on the matter, instructing us, “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior” (1 Pet 1:15). It is never the will of God that we sin; however, when we sin (and there is no Christian who does not sin), it is always His will that we handle it biblically by means of confession (1 John 1:9), which always results in forgiveness and restoration of fellowship. If we fail to walk in regular obedience to the Lord, we are subject to divine discipline in time (Heb 12:5-11), and loss of rewards in eternity (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 John 1:8). Though believers may turn from the Lord and pursue a life of sin, these will also experience divine punishment, even to the point of physical death (1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:16-17), but will not forfeit their salvation, which is not possible (John 10:28).

In summary, salvation is free. The Lord Jesus purchased it for us on the cross, and He offers it without cost to those who place their trust in Him. It is freely offered and freely received, and there’s nothing for us to pay. That’s grace. Our justification before God is a one-and-done event that happens at the moment of faith in Christ. Good works are not a prerequisite, corequisite, or postrequisite to salvation. That is, beyond simple faith in Christ, nothing is required of us before, during, or after we believe in Him as our Savior. We are saved by grace alone (we don’t deserve it), through faith alone (not by works), in Christ alone. Good works should follow salvation (Eph 2:10; Gal 6:10), but they are never the condition of it.

Once saved, God calls us to a lifelong process of sanctification. Sanctification is the life we live after being justified, and this process continues until we leave this world, either by death or rapture. The sanctified life requires us to learn and live God’s Word (2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18), walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38), be filled with the Spirit

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(Eph 5:18), walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16), and make ongoing good choices to stay on the path of God's will.

What About Lordship Salvation?

Though good works should follow justification, they are never the condition of it. Unfortunately, there are some who teach Lordship Salvation, which conflates justification with sanctification. Justification is a single event whereby we are declared righteous by God at the moment of faith in Christ. Sanctification is the process of growing spiritually and advancing in a life of good works. Those who advocate Lordship Salvation teach that in order to be saved, one must believe in Christ as Savior AND submit to His lordship, which means committing to a lifetime of obedience. According to John Frame, "you cannot accept Christ as Savior without accepting him as Lord...To receive Jesus as Lord is to make a commitment to keeping His commandments."⁸ And John MacArthur wrote, "Saving faith is a commitment to leave sin and follow Jesus Christ at all costs. Jesus takes no one unwilling to come on those terms."⁹ Though I love these men and appreciate much of their writings, I disagree with them on this matter, as their view presents salvation as a two-step-process where faith + commitment = salvation. It's faith in Christ PLUS a total commitment to a life of obedience. According to Charles Bing:

This view [of Lordship Salvation] demands that a person is saved through faith, but a faith that commits and surrenders to Jesus as the Lord of all of one's life. In other words, commitment and surrender are

⁸ John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 197.

⁹ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1988), 87.

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conditions of salvation. Resulting from this starting point is the belief that a true Christian is therefore one who evidences that commitment and surrender in a life of good works...[in this view] God's grace is no longer free, faith becomes works, and the unbeliever is subject to a performance basis for acceptance with God.¹⁰

¹⁰ Charles C. Bing, *Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship: How to Understand Some Difficult Bible Passages* (Brenham, TX: Lucid Books, 2015).

Additional Terminology Related to Soteriology

Additional Terminology Related to Soteriology

In previous sections, we discussed various biblical concepts related to soteriology. In the following sections, we will consider the biblical meaning of words related to our salvation and seek to unpack their theological significance. These terms are presented in alphabetical order and should be considered by the serious student of Scripture.

Adoption

Adoption

As those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we have been transferred from Satan's "domain of darkness" (Col 1:13) and placed into the family of God. Our new status is as "children of God" (John 1:12; cf., Rom 8:16; Phil 2:15). John wrote, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are" (1 John 3:1a). We do not come into the world as natural born children of God; rather, we are naturally born "in Adam" (1 Cor 15:21-22), as "sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2), and are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). But at the moment of faith in Christ, we receive "adoption as sons" (Rom 8:15; cf. Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5). The term *adoption* derives from the Greek word *huiiothesia* (ὑιοθεσία) which, according to BDAG, refers to "those who believe in Christ and are accepted by God as God's children...with full rights."¹ For the first time, as children of God, we have the privilege and right to cry out to God as "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:15). This adoption by God is an act of love and grace, for "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will" (Eph 1:5). Norman Geisler states:

Adoption (Grk: *huiiothesia*) means "placing as a son"; it signifies, literally, "a legal child" (Ex 2:10) and is used five times in the New Testament. Theologically, adoption (Gal 4:5) refers to the act of God that places a person as a son in God's family. Adoption is a term of position whereby one becomes a son by the new birth (John 1:12-13), is redeemed from the bondage of the law (Gal 4:1-5), and, although only a child (Grk: *teknion*), is by adoption made an adult son (Grk:

¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1024.

Adoption

huios), which is fully manifested at the resurrection of the body (Rom 8:23; cf. 1 John 3:2).²

Robert B. Thieme Jr., adds:

God’s bestowal of sonship and heirship upon believers is a grace gift at the moment of salvation (John 1:12–13; Gal 4:5–7; Eph 1:5). Through union with Christ, every Church Age believer, male or female, is adopted into God’s royal family and granted joint heirship with God the Son, who is the “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). Even though the new believer is a spiritual infant, adoption recognizes his position not as *nepios*, a young child, but as *huios*, an adult son (Gal 4:1–7). This royal son of God receives the full privileges and responsibilities of spiritual aristocracy, along with an eternal inheritance (Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14; Col 3:24; Rev 21:7).³

Our new position in God’s family should lead to better behavior in life, as each believer is “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph 4:1), and to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10). This will happen as we learn and live God’s Word (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16–17; 1 Pet 2:2), walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), advance to spiritual maturity (Heb 6:1), and “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).

² Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 226.

³ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Adoption”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 3.

Adoption

Though fully adopted as God's children, there is an eschatological aspect to our adoption that is pending our future glorified bodies. Paul wrote, "the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption" (Rom 8:21), and then draws a parallel with our status as children, saying, "even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:23). We are children by position, and will experience our freedom from sin when we receive our glorified bodies (Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2, 5).

Assurance of Salvation

Assurance of Salvation

At the moment of faith in Christ, we have eternal life. This is a fact, even if we don't fully understand it. In truth, most people will not understand what they have from God or find assurance of their salvation until they've studied God's Word and learned to live by faith. Doctrinal ignorance and/or false teaching will lead to fear and doubt. For those who have trusted Christ as their Savior, subsequent knowledge of God's Word and trust in it will yield assurance of their salvation. And, as one advances spiritually, there will also be a noticeable change within, and this too may provide a subjective assurance of salvation.

Objective Assurance of Salvation

The Bible reveals God is absolutely righteous and set apart from all that is sinful (Psa 11:7; 99:9; Hab 1:13; 1 John 1:5) and He hates and condemns sin (Deut 25:16; Psa 5:5; 45:7; Prov 8:13; 15:9, 26; 20:9; Zech 8:17; Rom 1:18; Col 3:6; Heb 1:9). The problem for us is that all mankind is sinful (Gen 6:5; 8:21; 1 Ki 8:46; Psa 143:2; Eccl 7:20; Isa 59:2; 64:6; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:10; 3:23; Eph 2:1-2; 1 John 1:8, 10). Not only are we sinful, but our good works have no saving merit (Rom 4:4-5; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). Our salvation was accomplished 100% by Jesus who died on the cross for our sins. Salvation is never what we do for God, but what He's done for us at the cross (Rom 5:8; 6:10; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 1 Pet 3:18). God offers to justify and save us freely as a gift, totally apart from any good works we may perform (Rom 3:24, 28, 4:5; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 3:18). God's salvation comes to us who have trusted in Christ as our Savior (John 3:15-18; 6:40; 10:28; 11:25; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 16:31; 1 John 5:12). Salvation means we have forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), the gift of righteousness (Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), eternal life (John 10:28), are part of the family

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of God (Gal 3:26; 1 John 3:1), are blessed with many spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3), and will never face condemnation (Rom 8:1, 33).

When we understand these truths by studying Scripture and accept them by faith, we have assurance of our salvation because we trust in God and His Word (Psa 119:160; John 17:17). The apostle Paul wrote, “I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Tim 1:12). The apostle John wrote, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11-12). The assurance of salvation does not come by looking to ourselves, but to the One who saved us. John also wrote, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Assurance of salvation is not a guessing game for those who have trusted in Jesus as their Savior, but is a confidence that is rooted in the revelation of God’s Word. For those of us who have trusted in Jesus as our Savior—believing He died for our sins, was buried, and raised again on the third day—we have eternal life. According to Zane Hodges, “It should be said here that all true assurance of salvation and *eternal life* must rest on the ‘testimony of God,’ for only that testimony has full reliability and solidity.”¹

What Calvinists and Arminians Generally Believe

Arminians are those who believe they are eternally secure in Christ, as long as they remain faithful in their walk with God. Like Catholics, they believe faith + works = salvation. They believe their salvation can be lost due to

¹ Zane Clark Hodges, *The Epistle of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 228.

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intentional, egregious, ongoing sin; therefore, they cannot have assurance of salvation because there's always the chance they may turn away from God and forfeit their salvation. This stands in contrast to the Calvinistic doctrine of perseverance of the saints, which teaches that those whom God has chosen will persevere in faith until the end.

Calvinists believe God gives His elect a special kind of faith that guarantees they will persevere to the end of their lives and be saved eternally; however, knowing they are among the elect is always a question in their minds that cannot be finally answered until they die. If they have persevered until the end, not having denied the Lord, and continued in good works, then they can know they were among the elect. If they fall into serious and prolonged sin, especially to the end of their lives, it strongly argues they were not among the elect who are said to persevere to the end. Kenneth D. Keathley notes, "Arminians know they are saved but are afraid they cannot keep it, while Calvinists know they cannot lose their salvation but are afraid they do not have it."² Norman Geisler correctly notes:

Arminians and strong Calvinists have much in common on this issue. Both assert that professing believers living in gross, unrepentant sin are not truly saved. Both insist that a person cannot be living in serious sin at the end of his life if he is truly saved. And both maintain that no one living in grave sin can be sure of his salvation.³

² Kenneth D. Keathley, "Perseverance and Assurance of the Saints," in *Whosoever Will*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 302.

³ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 302.

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Though Christians may, to some degree, advance spiritually by learning and living God's Word, and bear the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, this will never be consistent, because the taint of sin is also present in the life of every Christian, and this to varying degrees. Christians are never free from sin (1 John 1:8, 10), and God never promises to make us completely sinless during our time on earth, so consistency of performance is lacking. Because of our imperfect knowledge and imperfect life, our ability to analyze ourselves accurately will not always be consistent. John Walvoord notes:

The difficulty is that human experience may be far from a norm, may be inaccurately analyzed, and may be made the basis of an induction which in the last analysis is based only on fragmentary evidence...The only sure basis for salvation is the promise of God in the inspired Word of God which properly accepted by faith gives validity to assurance. One clear promise sustained by "Thus saith the Lord" is better than a thousand testimonies of human conviction without a specific ground. A proper doctrine of assurance of salvation is therefore inseparable from a belief in the inspired Word of God.⁴

The Word of God is the objective basis for what we believe, and our focus should always be on learning and living His Word so that we can expunge any false ideas and properly calibrate our thinking to align with His divine revelation. Jesus said we have "eternal life...and will never perish" (John 10:28); therefore, there is no danger of us losing our salvation, for there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), and "Who will bring a charge against God's

⁴ John F. Walvoord, "The Doctrine of Assurance in Contemporary Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 116 (1959): 198.

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elect? God is the one who justifies” (Rom 8:33). The matter of our eternal destiny was settled at the cross when Jesus paid the penalty for all our sins. And Jesus’ work on the cross was perfectly applied to us at the moment we trusted in Him as our Savior.⁵

Subjective Assurance of Salvation

Christians who are advancing spiritually may enjoy a subjective assurance of their salvation. Paul wrote, “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:16). According to William MacDonald, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with the believer’s spirit that he is a member of God’s family. He does it primarily through the Word of God. As a Christian reads the Bible, the Spirit confirms the truth that, because he has trusted the Savior, he is now a child of God.”⁶ This experience is valid only for believers who are in submission to God (Rom 12:1-2), learning and living Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2),

⁵ The Bible reveals that when we sin, we are walking in darkness and have broken fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-6), and stifled the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (Eph 4:30; 1 Th 5:19). If we continue in sin, or leave our sin unconfessed, we are in real danger of divine discipline from God (Psa 32:3-4; Heb 12:5-11; 1 John 5:16-17; cf. Dan 4:37), which can eventuate in physical death (1 John 5:16; cf., Lev 10:1-2; Acts 5:3-5; 1 Cor 11:30), and the loss of eternal rewards (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 John 1:8). If we confess our sin directly to God, He will immediately forgive it and restore us to fellowship (1 John 1:9; cf. Psa 32:5). Being in fellowship with God means learning and living His Word (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2), walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), being honest with Him about our sin (1 John 1:8, 10), and coming before His “throne of grace” (Heb 4:16) in transparent humility and confessing it in order to be forgiven (1 John 1:9; cf. Heb. 4:16). God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins every time we confess them because of the atoning work of Christ who shed His blood on the cross for us (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2).

⁶ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 1711.

Assurance of Salvation

walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), and advancing to spiritual maturity (Heb 6:1).

As believers, we have been “born again” (1 Pet 1:23), “made alive” spiritually (1 Cor 15:22), and are a “new creature” in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17). At the moment of salvation, God the Holy Spirit indwells us and gives us a new nature that, for the first time in our lives, has the capacity and desire to obey God. Paul wrote of his new nature in Christ when he said, “I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man” (Rom 7:22). Since we have the Spirit within us, as well as new spiritual life, it is natural to expect there will be some change in attitude and behavior. The degree to which this change occurs, in part, depends on our staying positive to the Lord.

As Christians, our assurance of eternal life is, first and foremost, based on the salvific work of Jesus on the cross (Acts 4:12; Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3-4), and the revelation of Scripture that we, who have trusted in Christ as our Savior (Acts 4:12, 16:31), “may know that [we] have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). This assurance is objective and constant, because God’s Word is sure and does not change.

Deliverance

Deliverance

The NT describes salvation in three tenses. Because we have trusted Christ as our Savior, we have been saved from the penalty of sin (Rom 5:16; 8:1, 33-34; Eph 2:8-9), are saved from the power of sin that we might live righteously (Rom 6:11; Col 3:5), and will, ultimately, be saved from the presence of sin when we leave this world and enter heaven (Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2, 5). These three aspects of our salvation are also referred to as *justification* (declared just before God once for all), *sanctification* (progressive righteousness over time), and *glorification* (removal of the sin nature after we leave this world). According to Charles Ryrie:

The inclusive sweep of salvation is underscored by observing the three tenses of salvation. (1) The moment one believed he was saved from the condemnation of sin (Eph 2:8; Tit 3:5). (2) That believer is also being saved from the dominion of sin and is being sanctified and preserved (Heb 7:25). (3) And he will be saved from the very presence of sin in heaven forever (Rom 5:9-10).¹

The first and third aspects of our salvation (i.e., justification and glorification) are accomplished by God without any human assistance. Concerning our justification, Scripture reveals that “God is the one who justifies” (Rom 8:33), and “who justifies the ungodly” (Rom 4:5). This is a work of God alone. No works are required for the one who trusts in Christ as Savior (Rom 4:4-5; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). Concerning our glorification, Jesus Christ is the One “who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Phil 3:21), and “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him” (1 John 3:2), and that

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 318–319.

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“in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). This means our future heavenly body will have no sin nature. This also is a work of God alone. However, the second aspect of our salvation, our sanctification, requires positive volition on our part. This is made obvious by the use of NT verbs that are in the imperative mood (i.e., a command), which requires the Christian to obey. As believers, we play a role in our sanctification as we learn and live God’s Word (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18), yield to God the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18; Gal 5:16, 25), walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), and advance to spiritual maturity (Heb 6:1).

After being justified (and awaiting glorification), it is possible for the Christian to go negative to God, not learn or live His Word, and remain a carnal Christian (1 Cor 3:1-3). Such a one will be subject to divine discipline (Heb 12:5-11), even to the point of physical death if their sinful lifestyle becomes egregious (1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:16-17), and they will forfeit future rewards (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 John 1:8).

Eternal Life

Eternal Life

John wrote, “whoever believes in Him will have eternal life” (John 3:15), and “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 Jesus pointed others to Himself, saying, “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40), and “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (John 6:47; cf., John 10:28). Jesus, when saying the believer “has” eternal life in John 6:47, used the Greek verb *echō* (ἔχω – *to have or possess*), which is in the present tense, meaning it’s a right-now-truth. That is, eternal life is what the believer possesses at the moment of faith in Christ. This eternal life is connected with being in a relationship with Jesus Christ. John wrote, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11-12). At the time of faith in Christ, “you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:30), and “Christ in you” (Col 1:27), and “your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). At that moment, you have the Son, and He has you, and “He who has the Son has the life” (1 John 5:12). According to Robert B. Thieme Jr., “When anyone believes in Christ, God the Father instantly imputes His own life to that person—‘He who has the Son has the life [God’s eternal life]’ (1 John 5:11–12).”¹ And Merrill F. Unger adds, “This life is nothing less than ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27). It is likened to a birth from above (John 3:3; 1:13) and is dependent upon receiving Christ as Savior. ‘He who has the Son has the life;

¹ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Eternal Life with God”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 89.

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he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life' (1 John 5:12)."²

We should also understand that eternal life does not merely refer to our unending existence in which we spend eternity with God in heaven, but that there's a qualitative dimension to it. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10), and "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Merrill C. Tenney states, "Eternal, the new life God gives, refers not solely to the duration of existence but also to the quality of life as contrasted with futility. It is a deepening and growing experience. It can never be exhausted in any measurable span of time, but it introduces a totally new quality of life."³ In its entirety, eternal life is a free gift offered by God to those who trust in Christ as Savior (John 3:16; Eph 2:8-9), an experience to be enjoyed now (John 4:13-14; 10:10; 17:3), and a future reward for a life of sacrifice (Luke 18:29-30). As we advance spiritually in our walk with the Lord by learning His Word (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18), being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), walking obediently by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), praying often (Eph 6:18; 1 Th 5:17), developing an attitude of gratitude (Eph 5:20; 1 Th 5:18), fellowshiping with other believers (Acts 2:42; Heb 10:25), engaging in worship (Eph 5:19; Heb 13:15), and allowing trials to shape us spiritually (Jam 1:2-4), we will experience what Paul told Timothy, when he instructed him to "take hold of the eternal life to which you were called" (1 Tim 6:12). This is the quality of life of believers who, in time, operate with positive volition

² Merrill F. Unger, "Eternal Life," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 379.

³ Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebel, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 50.

Eternal Life

toward God as their divine Parent and obey His directives to advance to spiritual maturity. Wiersbe notes, “We have ‘eternal life’ and need to take hold of it and let it work in our experience.”⁴ MacDonald adds, “He is to lay hold on eternal life. This does not mean that he is to strive for salvation. That is already his possession. But here the thought is to live out in daily practice the eternal life which was already his.”⁵ Joseph Dillow states:

Possessing eternal life is one thing in the sense of initial entrance, but “taking hold” of it is another. The former is static; the latter is dynamic. The former depends on God; the latter depends on us. The former comes through faith alone; “taking hold” requires faith plus “keeping commandments” (1 Timothy 6:14). Those who are rich in this world and who give generously “will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:19). Eternal life is not only the gift of regeneration; it is also “true life” that is cultivated by faith and acts of obedience.⁶

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2, 236.

⁵ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 2101.

⁶ Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, 4th Edition (Houston, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2018).

Expiation

Expiation

The doctrine of expiation is closely related to propitiation. Propitiation means *satisfaction* and refers to God the Father's approval of the death of Christ on behalf of sinners. Expiation emphasizes the removal of sin, as well as its guilt and punishment. Because God is holy and just, sin is an offense that demands His punishment. According to John Stott, God's wrath refers to "His steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations."¹ By means of the penal substitutionary atoning death of Jesus, God's wrath is satisfied concerning His righteous demands for our sin, and when we turn to Christ as Savior, all our sins are forgiven (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7; Col 2:13), and we are reconciled to God (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18-20). Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), and we know "He appeared in order to take away sins" (1 John 3:5), and that Jesus "released us from our sins by His blood" (Rev 1:5). Bruce Demarest states, "the focus of propitiation is Godward—Christ's sacrifice pays the penalty of sin so as to appease God's wrath. But the focus of expiation is humanward—Christ's sacrifice removes the stain of sin and the sinner's liability to suffer sin's punishment."² Charles Hodge adds, "Expiation and propitiation are correlative terms. The sinner, or his guilt is expiated; God, or justice, is propitiated."³

Propitiation is a word that speaks to our relationship with the Father. He was angry with us prior to our coming to

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 171.

² Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 180.

³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 478.

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Jesus, as we were “enemies” of God (Rom 5:10), spiritually “dead” in our trespasses (Eph 2:1; cf., Col 2:13), and “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). But now, because of the death of Christ, the Father accepts those who have trusted in Jesus as Savior, and has “forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:13b-14). Robert B. Thieme, Jr. states:

Expiation describes the work of Christ on the cross that canceled mankind’s debt owed for the penalty of sin. Man’s penalty for sin is spiritual death, total separation from God. This is the status of every human being at birth due to Adam’s fall (Rom 6:23a; Eph 2:1). The penalty placed all fallen humanity hopelessly in debt to God and incapable of paying the obligation. The only one qualified to pay was Jesus Christ, the Lamb without sin. He “bore our sins in His body on the cross” and was judged by God the Father (1 Pet 2:24a; cf. Isa 53:6b). Jesus Christ Himself covered the cost of man’s spiritual death and “canceled out the certificate of debt” (Col 2:14). As a result, every human being is released from obligation and free to accept or reject the grace gift of salvation.⁴

⁴ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Expiation”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 94.

Faith

Faith

The word faith is used three ways in Scripture:

1. Faith as a noun (*pistis πίστις*), often refers to “that which evokes trust and faith.”¹ The word is used with reference to God who is trustworthy (Rom 3:3; 4:19-21), and of people who possess faith (Matt 9:2, 22; 21:21), which can be great (Matt 15:28; cf. Acts 6:5; 11:23-24), small (Matt 17:19-20), or absent (Mark 4:39-40; cf. Luke 8:25). It is also used of Scripture itself as a body of reliable teaching (i.e. Acts 14:22; 16:5; Rom 14:22; Gal 1:23; 2 Tim 4:7). Paul was said to preach “the faith which he once tried to destroy” (Gal 1:23). Richard Longenecker notes that Paul “uses πίστις in Galatians in an absolute sense...to mean the content of the Christian gospel.”²
2. Faith as a verb (*pisteuō πιστεύω*), which means “to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust, believe...to entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence, believe (in), trust.”³ The word is used of trust in God (Gen 15:6; Heb 11:6; cf. Rom 4:3), trust in Jesus (Acts 16:31; 1 Pet 1:8), and trust in Scripture (John 2:22). According to J. Carl Laney Jr., “Believing in Christ means we acknowledge Him as God’s Son and Messiah and trust His person and work in securing our personal salvation. Believing in Christ means that we rely on Jesus alone to bring us safely

¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 818.

² Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 42.

³ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 817.

Faith

through life to heaven.”⁴

3. Faith as an adjective (*pistos πιστός*), which describes someone “being worthy of belief or trust, trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith.”⁵ The word is used of God (1 Cor 1:9; 10:13; 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 10:23; Rev 1:5), and of people (Matt 25:23; 1 Cor 4:17; Col 1:7; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 2:2; Heb 3:5).

Faith demands an object as it must have something or someone upon which to rest. To receive salvation, the unbeliever is told to “believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31a). For the unbeliever, faith in Christ is exercised with a view to receiving a benefit, and that benefit is eternal life (John 3:16). Faith does not save. God saves. Faith is merely the means by which the unsaved person receives salvation, as God alone does the saving. Though we may exercise faith and receive a benefit, the object always gets the credit, and in the case of our salvation, God alone gets the glory. And faith is never blind, but is an intelligent act of the will by the believer who hears and understands God’s Word. Paul tells us “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17; cf. 14:23; Heb 4:2; Jam 1:22). According to Charles Swindoll:

To believe in Christ is, first, to accept what He says as truth. Second, and more importantly, *pisteuō* means “to trust,” “to rely upon,” or “to derive confidence in” something or someone. When I say I believe in Jesus Christ, I declare that I trust Him, I rely upon Him, I have placed my complete confidence in Him; everything I know about this life and whatever occurs

⁴ J. Carl Laney Jr., et al, “Soteriology”, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 240.

⁵ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 820.

Faith

after death depends upon His claims about Himself and my positive response to His offer of grace.⁶

John Walvoord adds:

[Faith] is illustrated by the use of an elevator. A person may believe that the elevator is in good working order and would take him to the top floor of the building if he chose to get on board; but as long as he is outside the elevator, his belief that the elevator would take him to the top floor does not do him any good. Faith would mean that he stepped in the elevator and put his weight into it and committed himself to its mechanical perfections. Likewise, there is more than mere assent in the matter of believing in Christ.⁷

As Christians enter into phase two of their salvation, they learn to live by faith (Heb 10:38), submit to God (Rom 12:1), claim promises (Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 10:13; 1 John 1:9), give their cares to God (1 Pet 5:6-7), overcome fear (Deut 31:6-8; Isa 41:10-13), love others (1 Th 4:9), learn to rejoice (1 Th 5:16), pray continually (1 Th 5:17), be thankful (1 Th 5:18), and live with a relaxed mental attitude (Isa 26:3; Phil 4:11). Biblically, we know faith will be tested (1 Pet 1:6-7), is the only thing that pleases God (Heb 11:6), and should be exercised daily as we learn to “walk by faith” (2 Cor 5:7).

⁶ Charles R. Swindoll, *Acts, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary*, 147.

⁷ John F. Walvoord, *What We Believe*, 87.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness

In our relationship with God, there are two kinds of forgiveness. One is judicial and the other is parental. Judicial forgiveness is the forgiveness we receive from God when we stand before Him as the Judge of all humanity. This forgiveness occurs at the moment of faith in Christ, where “everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43; cf. Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). This is a one-and-done event that is never repeated, as we are “forgiven us all our transgressions” (Col 2:13). Parental forgiveness is the ongoing forgiveness we receive from God as our Father and is repeated many times throughout a believer’s life. Judicial forgiveness brings us into a right relationship with Him at the moment of faith in Christ. Parental forgiveness restores our fellowship with Him. Joseph Dillow states, “There are two kinds of forgiveness in the New Testament. One pertains to our eternal salvation (justification by faith), and the other to our temporal fellowship with the Father.”¹ According to William MacDonald, “There are two kinds of forgiveness, judicial and parental. When we trust Christ as Lord and Savior, we receive forgiveness from the penalty of sins; that is judicial forgiveness. When we, as believers, confess our sins, we receive parental forgiveness (1 John 1:9); this maintains fellowship with God our Father.”²

Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross is the basis for our forgiveness of sins. Scripture reveals, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7). *Forgiveness* translates the Greek word *aphesis* (ἄφεσις), which, according to BDAG, refers to “the act of freeing from

¹ Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny*.

² William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 863.

Forgiveness

an obligation, guilt, or punishment, pardon, cancellation.”³ It means releasing someone from a debt they cannot pay. Paul wrote that God has “forgiven us all our transgressions, having erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:13b-14). In Colossians 2:13, the word *forgiveness* translates the Greek word *charizomai* (χαρίζομαι), which means, “to show oneself gracious by forgiving wrongdoing, forgive, pardon.”⁴ This reveals the loving and gracious heart of God toward lost sinners, for whom Christ died (Rom 5:8). Warren Wiersbe states, “When He shed His blood for sinners, Jesus Christ canceled the huge debt that was against sinners because of their disobedience to God’s holy Law...In this way His Son paid the full debt when He died on the cross.”⁵ According to Norman Geisler:

The Greek word for forgiveness is *aphesis*, which means “to forgive” or “to remit” one’s sins. Hebrews declares that God cannot forgive without atonement, for “the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9:22). Paul announced: “Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (Acts 13:38). Forgiveness does not erase the sin; history cannot be changed. But forgiveness does erase the record of the sin. Like a pardon, the crime of the accused is not expunged from history but is deleted from his account. Hence, it is “in [Christ Jesus that] we have redemption through his

³ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 155.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1078.

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2, 127.

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blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Eph 1:7; cf. Col 1:14).⁶

Paul Enns adds:

Forgiveness is the legal act of God whereby He removes the charges that were held against the sinner because proper satisfaction or atonement for those sins has been made. There are several Greek words used to describe forgiveness. One is *charizomai*, which is related to the word grace and means "to forgive out of grace." It is used of cancellation of a debt (Col 2:13). The context emphasizes that our debts were nailed to the cross, with Christ's atonement freely forgiving the sins that were charged against us. The most common word for forgiveness is *aphiemi*, which means "to let go, release" or "send away." The noun form is used in Ephesians 1:7 where it stresses the believer's sins have been forgiven or sent away because of the riches of God's grace as revealed in the death of Christ. Forgiveness forever solves the problem of sin in the believer's life—all sins past, present, and future (Col 2:13). This is distinct from the daily cleansing from sin that is necessary to maintain fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). Forgiveness is manward; man had sinned and needed to have his sins dealt with and removed.⁷

Under the OT system of sacrifices, we are told, "in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed" (Rom 3:25). The animal sacrifices did not remove sin. It was a temporary arrangement whereby God "passed over" the sins of His people until the time when Christ would

⁶ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 227.

⁷ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 325–326.

Forgiveness

come and die for the sins of the world. Concerning Romans 3:25, Hoehner states this “has the idea of a temporary suspension of punishment for sins committed before the cross, whereas ἄφεσις is the permanent cancellation of or release from the punishment for sin because it has been paid for by Christ’s sacrifice.”⁸ Merrill F. Unger adds:

The great foundational truth respecting the believer in relationship to his sins is the fact that his salvation comprehends the forgiveness of all his trespasses past, present, and future so far as condemnation is concerned (Rom 8:1; Col 2:13; John 3:18; 5:24). Since Christ has vicariously borne all sin and since the believer’s standing in Christ is complete, he is perfected forever in Christ. When a believer sins, he is subject to chastisement from the Father but never to condemnation with the world (1 Cor 11:31–32).⁹

Though Christ died for everyone (Heb 2:9; 1 John 2:2), the benefit of forgiveness is available only to those who trust in Him as Savior. Thiessen notes, “The death of Christ made forgiveness possible, but not necessary, since Christ died voluntarily...God is still entitled to say on what conditions man may receive forgiveness.”¹⁰ Judicial forgiveness of sins is available to all, but each person must exercise their own volition and turn to Christ, and Christ alone, for salvation. The record of Scripture is that “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be

⁸ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 207.

⁹ Merrill F. Unger, “Forgiveness,” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 440.

¹⁰ Henry Clarence Thiessen and Vernon D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 276.

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saved” (Acts 4:12), and “everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43).

Familial Forgiveness of Sins

From the moment of our spiritual birth until we leave this world for heaven, we are in Christ and all our sins are judicially forgiven (Eph 2:5-6; Col 2:13). In addition, we have a new spiritual nature (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), and the power to live righteously in God’s will (Rom 6:11-14). However, during our time in this world, we still possess a sin nature (Rom 7:14-25; Gal 5:17), and occasionally yield to temptation (both internal and external) and commit sin. According to William MacDonald, “Conversion does not mean the eradication of the sin nature. Rather it means the implanting of the new, divine nature, with power to live victoriously over indwelling sin.”¹¹ Our acts of sin do not jeopardize our eternal salvation which was secured by the Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:28), but it does hurt our walk with the Lord (1 John 1:5-10), and stifles the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 4:30; 1 Th 5:19). Though we try to keep our sins small and few, the reality is that we continue to sin, and some days more than others. As we grow spiritually in our knowledge of God’s Word, we will pursue righteousness more and more and sin will diminish, but sin will never completely disappear from our lives. Living in the reality of God’s Word, we know three things are true when we sin:

First, there is no condemnation (Rom 8:1). Though we have sinned against God, our eternal security and righteous standing before Him is never jeopardized. We are eternally secure (John 10:28), and continue to possess the righteousness of God that was imputed to us at the moment of salvation (Rom 4:1-5; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9).

¹¹ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 2310.

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Second, we have broken fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-6). When we sin, as a Christian, we have broken fellowship with God and stifled the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (1 John 1:5-6; Eph 4:30; 1 Th 5:19). If we continue in sin, or leave our sin unconfessed, we are in real danger of divine discipline from God (Psa 32:3-4; Heb 12:5-11; 1 John 5:16-17; cf. Dan 4:37), which can eventuate in physical death (1 John 5:16; cf., Lev 10:1-2; Acts 5:3-5).

Third, if we confess our sin to God, He will forgive that sin and restore us to fellowship (1 John 1:9; cf. Psa 32:5). Being in fellowship with God means walking in the sphere of His light (1 John 1:5-7), being honest with Him about our sin (1 John 1:8, 10), and coming before His “throne of grace” (Heb 4:16) in transparent humility and confessing that sin in order to be forgiven familiarly (1 John 1:9). God is faithful and just to forgive our sins every time we confess them because of the atoning work of Christ who shed His blood on the cross for us (1 John 2:1-2). John wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Concerning 1 John 1:9, William MacDonald states:

The forgiveness John speaks about here [i.e. 1 John 1:9] is parental, not judicial. Judicial forgiveness means forgiveness from the penalty of sins, which the sinner receives when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is called judicial because it is granted by God acting as Judge. But what about sins which a person commits after conversion? As far as the penalty is concerned, the price has already been paid by the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary. But as far as fellowship in the family of God is concerned, the sinning saint needs parental forgiveness, that is, the forgiveness of His Father. He obtains it by confessing his sin. We need judicial forgiveness only once; that takes care of

Forgiveness

the penalty of all our sins—past, present, and future. But we need parental forgiveness throughout our Christian life.¹²

God’s grace compels us to pursue righteousness and good works (Tit 2:11-14), which God has prepared for us to walk in (Eph 2:10). But since we still have a sinful nature and live in a fallen world with temptation all around, we occasionally fall into sin. When we sin, we agree with God that we have sinned and we confess it to Him seeking His forgiveness. When we sin against others and wrongly hurt them, we confess our sin to them and ask for their forgiveness. Because our sin hurts others (and their sin hurts us), there is a need for love, patience, humility, and ongoing forgiveness among the saints. The apostle Paul wrote “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and **forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful” (Col 3:12-15).

¹² Ibid., 2310-11.

Grace

Grace

Grace is seen throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. The Hebrew noun *chen* (חֵן) appears 69 times and, according to James Swanson, means “grace, kindness, kindheartedness, compassion, i.e., acts of kindness...which benefit the object of pleasure.”¹ The word is used of God (Gen 6:8; Ex 33:17) and people (Gen 34:11; 39:3-4), and sometimes refers to an attractive quality, such as speech (Psa 45:2; Prov 22:11). The Hebrew verb *chanan* (חָנַן) appears about 80 times and, according to HALOT, means “merciful, kind, gracious.”² This characteristic is used both of God (Ex 34:6; Psa 86:15; 103:8) and people (Psa 37:21; 112:5). The verb commonly refers to the favor one person extends to another when it is not deserved or expected. Merrill F. Unger states, “*Chanan* may express ‘generosity,’ a gift from the heart (Psa 37:21). God especially is the source of undeserved ‘favor’ (Gen 33:11), and He is asked repeatedly for such ‘gracious’ acts as only He can do (Num 6:25; Gen 43:29).”³

The Greek word *charis* (χάρις) appears 155 times in the New Testament and is most commonly translated *grace* or *favor* (John 1:14; Rom 4:4). The word is also used to express *thanks* (1 Cor 15:57; 2 Cor 9:15), or *attractiveness* (Luke 4:22; Col 4:6). Paul uses the word 130 times. Grace refers to “a beneficent disposition toward someone, favor, grace, gracious care/help, [or] goodwill.”⁴ This definition speaks of the

¹ James Swanson, “חֵן (hēn)” *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

² Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 333.

³ Merrill F. Unger, “To Be Gracious, Show Favor,” *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 100.

⁴ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1079.

Grace

attitude of one who is characterized by grace. A gracious act is “that which one grants to another, the action of one who volunteers to do something not otherwise obligatory.”⁵ Jesus is an example of grace, in that He cared for others, healing and feeding many (Matt 4:24; 14:15-21), even to those who refused to show gratitude (Luke 17:12-19). He acted out of His own goodness, for the benefit of others, with a full knowledge the majority would reject Him and abuse His kindness (John 3:19; 12:37). Others may not understand or accept what is offered by grace, but this is not for want of a gracious attitude or action on the part of the giver, where the benefactor freely confers a blessing upon another and the kindness shown finds its source in the bounty and free-heartedness of the giver. Once grace is received, it can, in turn, lead to gracious acts to others (Matt 5:43-45; Luke 6:32-36). In this way, grace leads to grace. The greatest expression of grace is observed in the love God shows toward underserving sinners for whom He sent His Son to die in their place so we might have eternal life in Christ (1 John 3:1; cf., John 3:16-19; Rom 5:8).

Everyone needs God’s grace, because we are all born in sin. We are sinners in Adam (Rom 5:12-21), sinners by nature (Psa 51:5; Rom 7:19-21; Eph 2:3), and sinners by choice (1 Ki 8:46; Eccl 7:20; Isa 59:2; Rom 3:10, 23; 1 John 1:8, 10). Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden is the first and greatest of them all. Because of Adam’s rebellion against God, sin and death entered the human race (Rom 5:12, 19; 1 Cor 15:21-22) and spread throughout the universe (Rom 8:20-22). All of Adam’s descendants are born into this world spiritually dead in “trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1), and are by nature “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3), “separate from Christ...having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12), “alienated” from God (Col 1:21), helpless, ungodly, sinners,

⁵ Ibid., 1079.

Grace

and enemies of God (Rom 5:6-10). From a biblical perspective, we are all born totally depraved. According to Lewis Chafer, “Theologians employ also the phrase total depravity, which does not mean that there is nothing good in any unregenerate person as seen by himself or by other people; it means that there is nothing in fallen man which God can find pleasure in or accept.”⁶ Total depravity means we are corrupted by sin and completely helpless to save ourselves.

God’s grace does not ignore righteousness or judgment. God is righteous and He must condemn sin. He can either condemn sin in the sinner, or in a substitute. According to Merrill F. Unger, “since God is holy and righteous, and sin is a complete offense to Him, His love or His mercy cannot operate in grace until there is provided a sufficient satisfaction for sin. This satisfaction makes possible the exercise of God’s grace.”⁷ Christ is our substitute. He bore the penalty of all our sins and satisfied every righteous demand of the Father, for “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2; cf. Rom 3:24-25; 1 John 4:10). According to Lewis Chafer, “grace is what God may be free to do and indeed what He does accordingly for the lost after Christ has died on behalf of them.”⁸ God’s love for sinners moved Him to provide a solution to the problem of sin, and that solution is Christ who died in our place. Once we have trusted in Christ for salvation—and trusted in Him alone—God then bestows on us forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), eternal life (John 10:28), and many other blessings (Eph 1:3). For those who reject God’s salvation by grace, they are left to trust in themselves and their own good works to gain entrance into

⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 7, 118–119.

⁷ Merrill F. Unger et al., “Grace” in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 504.

⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol 7, 178.

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heaven, and this will fail miserably for those who elect this course. In the end, these will be judged by their works, and because those works never measure up to God's perfect righteousness, they will be cast in the Lake of Fire forever (Rev 20:11-15).

There is a common grace God extends to everyone, whether they are good or evil. God simply extends grace to all, and all receive it. Jesus said of the Father, "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt 5:45). Paul said, "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways [in rebellion]; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:16-17). In these passages, God's grace is freely given to all, and this because He is gracious by nature.

However, there is special grace given to those who will welcome it. Special grace refers to those blessings that God freely confers upon those who, in humility, turn to Him in a time of need. *First*, there is saving grace that God provides for the lost sinner who turns to Christ in faith alone. Paul wrote, "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). *Second*, there is a growing grace for the humble believer who studies and lives God's Word. Peter tells us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18). *Third*, there is a grace God gives—a divine enablement—to help a believer cope with some life stress. Paul, when facing a difficulty, cried out to the Lord (2 Cor 12:7-8), and the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). Humility and positive volition are necessary requisites for those who would receive God's special grace, for "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5; cf. Jam 4:6).

Grace

God's saving grace is never cheap. Our salvation is very costly. Jesus went to the cross and died in our place and bore the punishment that rightfully belongs to us. He is righteous. We are lost sinners. He paid our sin debt in full. There's nothing for us to add to what He accomplished. The sole condition of salvation is to believe in Christ as our Savior. He died for us, was buried, and rose again on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4), and we know "that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again" (Rom 6:9). Salvation is not Jesus plus anything we do. It's Jesus alone. He saves. Our contribution to the cross was sin and death, as Jesus took our sin upon Himself and died in our place. Peter wrote, "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). We are brought to God solely by the death of Christ. His shed blood on the cross made the way possible. Salvation is never what we do for God; rather, it's what He's done for us through the cross of Christ. All of this consistent with the character of God, for He is gracious by nature. Scripture reveals, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6), and, "You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth" (Psa 86:15). God the Father is described as "the God of all grace" (1 Pet 5:10), who sits upon a "throne of grace" (Heb 4:16), who "gives grace to the afflicted" (Prov 3:34), and provides salvation "by grace" through faith in Jesus (Eph 2:8-9; cf., Acts 15:11; Rom 3:24). Jesus is said to be "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), and the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of grace" (Heb 10:29).

In order for us to be reconciled to God, we must simply trust in Jesus as our Savior (John 3:16; 20:30-31; Acts 4:12; 16:30-31). When we trust in Christ as our Savior, we are forgiven all our sins (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 2:13), 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).

Grace

Guilt

Guilt

Biblically speaking, guilt implies one has acted contrary to God's moral character and laws. Divine laws are a reflection of the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God may be defined as the intrinsic, immutable, moral perfection of God, from which He commands all things, in heaven and earth, and declares as good that which conforms to His righteousness and as evil that which deviates. God's character is the basis upon which all just laws derive; either divine laws from God Himself or human laws which conform to His righteousness.¹ The Bible reveals "the LORD is righteous and He loves righteousness" (Psa 11:7). We're informed that at a future time, "He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness" (Psa 96:13), and He will "judge the living and the dead" (2 Tim 4:1). The problem is that all humanity is corrupt, for "are all under sin" (Rom 3:9), and "there is none righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10), for "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Sin may be defined as the breaking of God's moral laws. John wrote, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Sin is when we transgress God's law and depart from His intended path. According to J. I. Packer, "Sin may be comprehensively defined as lack of conformity to the law of God in act, habit, attitude, outlook, disposition, motivation, and mode of existence."² The motivation behind sin is self-interest. It means we set our wills against the will of God; that we desire our interests above His interests and are willing to act contrary to His directives.

¹ If there is no God, then there is no absolute standard for right and wrong and we are left with arbitrary laws based on manufactured values.

² J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*, 82.

Guilt

According to Augustus Strong, “the sinner makes self the center of his life, sets himself directly against God and constitutes his own interest the supreme motive and his own will the supreme rule.”³ Samuel Harris notes four characteristics of sin, namely, “It is self-sufficiency, the opposite of Christian faith...It is self-will, the opposite of Christian submission...It is self-seeking, the opposite of Christian benevolence...It is self-righteousness, the opposite of Christian humility and reverence.”⁴ Merrill F. Unger states:

The underlying idea of sin is that of law and of a lawgiver. The lawgiver is God. Hence sin is everything in the disposition and purpose and conduct of God’s moral creatures that is contrary to the expressed will of God (Rom 3:20; 4:15; 7:7; Jam 4:12, 17). The sinfulness of sin lies in the fact that it is against God, even when the wrong we do is to others or ourselves (Gen 39:9; Psa 51:4).⁵

As sinners before a holy and righteous God, we bear an objective guilt because we have violated His holy character and righteous demands. We are responsible to God for what we *have*, what we *are*, and what we *do*. We *have* Adam’s original sin, which has been imputed to our account (Rom 5:12-13; cf. 1 Cor 15:21-22), we *are* sinners by nature (Psa 51:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 7:14-25; 13:12-14), and we *do* sin personally (Prov 20:9; Eccl 7:20; Isa 59:2; 64:6; Jam 1:14-15). God holds us accountable for our sinfulness. Our guilt is based on what God says about us and not our subjective impressions of ourselves. J. C. Moyer states, “Guilt is both the legal and

³ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 572.

⁴ Samuel Harris, “The Christian Law of Self-Sacrifice,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 18, no. 69 (1861): 149.

⁵ Merrill F. Unger, “Sin,” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 1198.

Guilt

moral condition that results from breaking God's law."⁶ Louis Berkhof adds, "Guilt is the state of deserving condemnation or of being liable to punishment for the violation of a law or a moral requirement. It expresses the relation which sin bears to justice or to the penalty of the law."⁷ C.W. Stenschke states:

In biblical language and thought guilt and sin are closely related. While sin usually denotes an action of personal failure (in deed, word or thought), guilt is a legal term that denotes the state resulting from this action. Guilt is an objective fact and arises when God's standards have not been met, when the creator's claim on his creation is neglected or refused whether willfully or unintentionally.⁸

Being guilty before God is a fact and not a feeling. It is based on the objective truth of God's Word and not our subjective impressions or fluctuating emotions. Our emotions are a blessing from the Lord, but only when properly calibrated to the truth of His revelation, otherwise they can be an impediment to our relationship with Him.

Humanism rejects God and His revelation and places mankind at the center of morality and meaning. Francis Schaeffer explains humanism as "Man beginning from himself, with no knowledge except what he himself can discover and no standards outside of himself. In this view Man is the measure of all things, as the Enlightenment expressed

⁶ J. C. Moyer, "Guilt; Guilty," ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, 580.

⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 232.

⁸ C. W. Stenschke, "Guilt," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 529.

Guilt

it.”⁹ But atheism creates a problem concerning moral absolutes, for if there is no God, then there is no moral absolute Law-giver; and if there is no moral absolute Law-giver, then there are no moral absolutes, and we are left to conclude that what is, is right, and any further discussion about right and wrong becomes nothing more than opinion.¹⁰ Francis Schaeffer is correct when he states:

If there is no absolute moral standard, then one cannot say in a final sense that anything is right or wrong. By absolute we mean that which always applies, that which provides a final or ultimate standard. There must be an absolute if there are to be morals, and there must be an absolute if there are to be real values. If there is no absolute beyond man’s ideas, then there is no final appeal to judge between individuals and groups whose moral judgments conflict. We are merely left with conflicting opinions.¹¹

Those who reject God are left to create and impose arbitrary values on others, and the tyrants of the world are glad to bully and control others by means of strong arm tactics, whether social intimidation, economic coercion, or brute physical force. The only objective standard for measuring

⁹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 24.

¹⁰ God does exist, as “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands” (Psa 19:1). And though people may “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18), the reality is, “that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:19-20).

¹¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*, 50th L’Abri Anniversary Edition. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 145.

Guilt

righteousness or guilt is set forth in God's Word which defines reality. The Bible reveals God is "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen 18:25), and He "is a righteous judge" (Psa 7:11), and He "judges righteously" (Jer 11:20), and "will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex 34:7). Yet, the Bible also reveals God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth" (Psa 86:15), and One "Who pardons all your iniquities" (Psa 103:3), when we come to Him in honesty and humility. And for those who come to Him in humility, who are like the tax collector, who "was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'" (Luke 18:13), will find Him to be merciful. For those of us who trust in Christ as Savior, we are blessed with "forgiveness of sins" (Eph 1:7; cf., Acts 10:43), the "gift of righteousness" (Rom 5:17; cf., 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), "eternal life" (John 10:28), and become "children of God" (John 1:12), with a promise that we will spend eternity in heaven with Him (John 14:1-3). J. Dwight Pentecost notes, "If you should be without Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you stand guilty before God because you are still in Adam's race. Even though Christ bore that sin, it means nothing to you until you are related to Him by faith. The righteousness of Christ cannot be imputed to you unless you personally receive Jesus Christ as your Savior."¹² If you have not yet trusted in Christ as your Savior, then I "beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).

¹² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine*, 48.

Holiness

Holiness

*The Bible reveals God is holy.*¹ God declares of Himself, “I am holy” (Lev 11:44), and the psalmist says, “holy is the LORD our God” (Psa 99:9), and the Seraphim declare, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:3). In these verses, the word “holy” translates the Hebrew word *qadōsh* (קָדוֹשׁ), which means “to be holy, [or] separated.”² James Swanson says it refers “to being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essential divine qualities in contrast with what is human.”³ God’s holiness is closely linked with His righteousness, justice, and perfection. Holiness denotes moral purity.

Because God is absolutely holy (Psa 99:9; Isa 6:3; Rev 15:4), it is written, “no evil dwells with You” (Psa 5:4). By definition, evil is “any act or event that is contrary to the good and holy purposes of God...Moral evil refers to acts (sins) of creatures that are contrary to God’s holy character and law.”⁴ According to Merrill F. Unger, moral evil “is the failure of rational and free beings to conform in character and conduct to the will of God.”⁵ George Howley states, “God is separate

¹ The apostle Paul referred to the Bible as “the holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:2), and “the sacred writings” (2 Tim 3:15). The terms “holy” and “sacred” mean the Bible is a special book in that it conveys divine revelation from God to mankind (2 Tim 3:16-17). Though written by human authors under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20-21), the end product is “the word of God, which performs its work in you who believe” (1 Th 2:13).

² Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 868.

³ James Swanson, “קָדוֹשׁ”, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*.

⁴ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 48.

⁵ Merrill Frederick Unger, “Evil” *The New Unger’s Bible*

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from all evil and is in no way responsible for it...[and] It can only be attributed to the abuse of free-will on the part of created beings, angelic and human.”⁶ Evil originates in the heart (Gen 6:5; Zech 8:17), can result in evil actions (Neh 13:17; Prov 24:8; 1 Pet 3:12), lead to proneness of evil (Ex 32:22; Deut 9:24), and mark an entire generation of people (Deut 1:35; Matt 12:45).

Being holy means God cannot be affixed to anything morally imperfect. This means the Lord cannot condone sin in any way. Scripture reveals, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Hab 1:13), and “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Everett Harrison states:

The basic idea conveyed by the holiness of God is His separateness, i.e., His uniqueness, His distinction as the Wholly Other, the One who cannot be confused with the gods devised by men (Ex 15:11), the One who stands apart from and above the creation. Secondly the holiness of God denotes His moral perfection, His absolute freedom from blemish of any kind (Psa 89:35).⁷

The third Person of the Trinity bears the specific title of *the Holy Spirit* (John 14:26), which emphasizes His righteousness and separateness from sin (Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30). Jesus, as the Son of God, embodies the holiness of God in human form. Scripture tells us that Jesus was “holy, innocent, pure, and set apart from sinners” (Heb 7:26). Jesus lived and interacted with sinners (i.e., eating with them, attending

Dictionary, 382.

⁶ George Howley, “Evil,” *New Bible Dictionary*, 349.

⁷ Everett F. Harrison, “Holiness; Holy,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, 725.

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weddings, etc.), but He never had sinful thoughts, spoke sinful words, or acted in sinful ways. No matter what was happening around Him, Jesus never crossed the line into sin. Without abandoning righteousness, He loved and spoke truth, displayed compassion, helped the weak, and rebuked the arrogant. He was always holy in thought, word, and deed, and though near to others, He was still “set apart from sinners” (Heb 7:26).

In one sense, a person or group is holy—set apart to God—simply by being part of the covenant community. It was said of Israel, “all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst” (Num 16:3). According to Allen Ross, “They were holy, because the Lord who set them apart was holy.”⁸ Merrill F. Unger notes, “God has dedicated Israel as His people. They are ‘holy’ by their relationship to the ‘holy’ God. All of the people are in a sense ‘holy,’ as members of the covenant community, irrespective of their faith and obedience.”⁹ Being set apart to God, the Lord expected His people to be set apart from the world and behave in conformity with His righteous character and directives. Unger states, “Based on the intimate nature of the relationship, God expected His people to live up to His ‘holy’ expectations and, thus, to demonstrate that they were a ‘holy nation.’”¹⁰ The Lord told His people, “you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine” (Lev 20:26). According to Allen Ross, “The means of developing holiness required faith and obedience on their part. But because it was a nation of very human and often stubborn individuals, progression toward holiness did not

⁸ Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 378.

⁹ W. E. Vine, et al, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 113.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

Holiness

develop instantly or easily, and for some it did not develop at all.”¹¹

This is also true of Christians who are called “saints”, not because we act saintly, but because of our relation to God as part of the church, the body of Christ. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (1 Cor 1:2). The word “saints” here translates the Greek *hagios* (ἅγιος), which pertains “to being dedicated or consecrated to the service of God.”¹² In this passage, *hagios* is a synonym for a believer in Christ, not a description of their character. All Christians are saints (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:1-2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2). The Christians at Corinth were saints (positionally), even when they were behaving like mere men (1 Cor 3:1-3). Warren Wiersbe states:

The church is made up of saints, that is, people who have been “sanctified” or “set apart” by God. A saint is not a dead person who has been honored by men because of his or her holy life. No, Paul wrote to living saints, people who, through faith in Jesus Christ, had been set apart for God’s special enjoyment and use. In other words, every true believer is a saint because every true believer has been set apart by God and for God.¹³

Christians living in the dispensation of the church age are called to holy living. Peter wrote, “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;

¹¹ Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 48.

¹² William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 10.

¹³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, 568.

Holiness

because it is written, ‘you shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:15-16). God, who is our Father, is holy, and He calls for His children to live holy lives. For Christians, living holy to the Lord is accomplished by advancing to spiritual maturity and living as obedient-to-the-Word believers (Heb 6:1). It means learning God’s Word (Psa 1:2-3; Ezra 7:10; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2), living in submission to Him (Rom 12:1-2; Jam 4:7), walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), walking by means of the Spirit (Gal 5:16), accepting trials that help us grow (Jam 1:2-4), being devoted to prayer (Col 4:2; 1 Th 5:17; Eph 6:18), worship (Heb 13:15), being thankful (1 Th 5:18), fellowshiping with other believers (Heb 10:24-25), serving others (Gal 5:13; 6:10; 1 Pet 4:10; Phil 2:3-4), and taking advantage of the time we have (Eph 5:15-16). On the negative side, it means not loving the world (Jam 4:4; 1 John 2:15-16), nor quenching the Spirit (1 Th 5:19), nor grieving the Spirit (Eph 4:30). If we turn to sin—and that’s always a possibility—it means we are not living holy lives as God expects. When Christians sin, it does not result in loss of salvation, but loss of fellowship with God. It also means that if we continue to live sinfully, that God may discipline us (Heb 12:5-11), and deny us eternal rewards (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 John 1:8). Humble believers acknowledge their sin, and God restores them to fellowship when they confess it to Him, seeking His forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

Imputed Righteousness

Imputed Righteousness

The Bible reveals that God imputes His righteousness to the believer at the moment of salvation. The word *imputation* itself is an accounting term used both in the Old Testament and the New Testament (Gen 15:6; Psa 32:2; Rom 4:3-8; Gal 3:6). Biblically, there are three major imputations that relate to our standing before God.

First is the imputation of Adam's original sin to every member of the human race. Paul wrote, "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), and "by the transgression of the one the many died" (Rom 5:15), for "judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation" (Rom 5:16), and "by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one" (Rom 5:17), for "through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men" (Rom 5:18). Paul finally stated, "through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (Rom 5:19). And to the Christians at Corinth, he wrote, "by a man came death" (1 Cor 15:21a), and "in Adam all die" (1 Cor 15:22a). This means every biological descendant of Adam is charged/credited with the sin he committed in the Garden of Eden which plunged the human race into spiritual and physical death. Jesus is the only exception, for though He is truly human (John 1:14), He was born without original sin, without a sin nature, and committed no personal sin during His time on earth (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Adam is the head of the human race and his fall became our fall. This is the basis for death and for being estranged from God. Robert B. Thieme Jr., states:

[Adam's Original Sin refers to] the initial act of willful, cognitive disobedience to God committed by the first man, Adam, when he violated God's mandate

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to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:17; 3:6). The initial human sin resulted in Adam's immediate spiritual death, the formation of the sin nature, and loss of his relationship with God (Gen 3:7; Rom 6:23). Since Adam is the physical and representative head of the human race, his corrupt sin nature is genetically passed on through procreation to all his descendants (Rom 5:12).¹

God decided that one man, Adam, would serve as the representative head of the human race and that all would stand or fall with him. When Adam sinned, we fell with him, and as a result, his original sin is imputed to us, and we inherit his sinful nature. Furthermore, our personal sin adds to our guilt (Rom 6:23).²

Second is the imputation of all sin to Jesus on the cross (Isa 53:4-6, 10; 2 Cor 5:21). God the Father judged Jesus in our place (Mark 10:45; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 1 Pet 3:18), cancelling our sin debt by the death of Christ (Col 2:13-14; 2 Cor 5:18-19). This was a voluntary imputation on the part of Christ who freely went to the cross and took our sins upon Himself (John 1:29; 10:11, 15, 17-18). Scripture states, "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities" (Isa 53:5), and "the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa 53:6), and Jesus was "the Lamb

¹ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. "Adam's Original Sin", *Thieme's Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 1-2.

² Some might argue that it's not fair that we are held accountable and condemned because of Adam's sin. If one argues along these lines, then it would not be fair that God judged Jesus, an innocent man, for our sins on the cross. Nor would be it be fair that we, ungodly sinners, be declared justified because we receive God's righteousness as a gift. To deny condemnation based on imputed guilt would also deny justification based on imputed righteousness.

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of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), and He “tasted death for everyone” (Heb 2:9), and was offered once on the cross “to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28), and “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Pet 2:24), and “Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust” (1 Pet 3:18). Thieme explains:

On the cross, the justice of God the Father imputed all the sins of mankind to His beloved Son, Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:24). This was a judicial imputation because sin has no affinity with the impeccable humanity of Christ, no home in Him. To complete the judicial action, the Father’s justice immediately judged every one of those sins in Christ. Our personal sins are never imputed to us for judgment. Rather, the perfect humanity of Christ was “pierced through for our transgressions,” taking upon Himself the penalty that rightfully belonged to all men (Isa 53:5). This substitutionary work satisfied God’s righteousness and justice and made possible our so-great salvation (2 Cor 5:21; 1 John 2:2).³

Third is the imputation of God’s righteousness to those who believe in Jesus for salvation (Rom 4:3-5; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:8-9). The righteousness of God imputed to the believer at the moment of faith in Christ results in the believer being justified before God (Rom 3:24, 28; 4:1-5). Moses wrote of Abraham, saying, “Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned [חָשַׁב *chashab*] it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). David writes, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute [חָשַׁב *chashab*] iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Psa 32:1-2).

³ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Imputations”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 137.

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Moses and David both use the Hebrew *chashab* (חָשַׁב) which, according to HALOT, means “to impute, reckon to.”⁴ Moses uses the verb in a positive sense of that which God imputes to Abraham, namely righteousness, and David uses the verb negatively, of that which God does not credit to a person, namely iniquity. Allen P. Ross comments on the meaning of *chashab* (חָשַׁב) in Psalm 32:2 and Genesis 15:6:

Not only does forgiveness mean that God takes away the sins, but it also means that God does not “impute” iniquity to the penitent: “Blessed is the one to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity.” The verb (חָשַׁב) means “impute, reckon, credit”; it is the language of records, or accounting—in fact, in modern usage the word is related to “computer.” Here the psalm is using an implied comparison, as if there were record books in heaven that would record the sins. If the forgiven sins are not imputed, it means that there is no record of them—they are gone and forgotten. Because God does not mark iniquities (Psa 130:4), there is great joy. The same verb is used in Genesis 15:6 as well, which says that Abram “believed in the LORD, and he reckoned it (וַיַּחְשְׁבֵהָ) to him as righteousness.” The apostle Paul brings that verse and Psalm 32:2 together in Romans 4 to explain the meaning of justification by faith: when people believe in the Lord, God *reckons* or credits them with righteousness (Paul will say, the righteousness of Jesus Christ), and *does not reckon* their sin to them.⁵

The apostle Paul cites Abraham’s faith in God as the

⁴ Ludwig Koehler, et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 360.

⁵ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Kregel Publications, 2011), 710-711.

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basis upon which he was declared righteous before Him, saying, “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited [*logizomai*] to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3).⁶ Paul uses the Greek verb *logizomai* (λογίζομαι) which, according to BDAG, means “to determine by mathematical process, reckon, calculate, frequently in a transferred sense.”⁷ Abraham believed God’s Word, and God *reckoned*, or *transferred* His righteousness to him. After pointing to Abraham as the example of justification by faith, Paul then extrapolates that we are justified in the same way, saying, “Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited [*logizomai*] as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited [*logizomai*] as righteousness” (Rom 4:4-5; cf. Gal 3:6). Paul then references David, saying, “David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits [*logizomai*] righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. ‘Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account [*logizomai*]’” (Rom 4:6-8).

Paul twice used the Greek verb *ellogēō* (ἐλλογέω) to communicate the idea of an exchange between persons (Rom 5:13; Phm 1:18). According to BDAG, the verb *ellogēō* (ἐλλογέω) means “to charge with a financial obligation, charge to the account of someone.”⁸ Paul told his friend, Philemon, concerning his runaway slave Onesimus, “if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge [*ellogēō* ἐλλογέω] that to my account” (Phlm 1:18). Paul had

⁶ The translators of the Septuagint use *logizomai* (λογίζομαι) as a reliable synonym for *chashab* (חָשַׁב) both in Genesis 15:6 and Psalm 32:2. Paul then uses *logizomai* (λογίζομαι) when making his argument that justification is by faith alone in God (Rom 4:3-5; Gal 3:6).

⁷ William Arndt et al, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 597.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 319.

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not wronged Philemon, nor did he owe him anything; however, Paul was willing to pay for any wrong or debt Onesimus may have incurred. J. Dwight Pentecost notes:

Paul is giving us an illustration of that which God has done for us in Christ Jesus. As the Apostle assumed the debt of Onesimus and invited Philemon—who had been wronged—to charge that debt to him, so the Lord Jesus Christ took the debt that we owed to the injured One—to God—and He charged Himself with our debt and set His righteousness down to our account.⁹

In a similar way, Jesus paid for our sin so that we don't have to, and in exchange, we receive God's righteousness. This idea of an exchange between persons means that one person is credited with something not antecedently his/her own. Our sin is our sin, and Christ's righteousness is His righteousness. When Jesus took our sin upon himself at the cross, He voluntarily accepted something that belonged to another, namely us. Jesus took our sin upon Himself. On the other hand, when we receive God's righteousness as a gift, we are accepting something that belonged to another, namely God. By faith, we accept that which belongs to God, namely, His righteousness. God's righteousness becomes our righteousness. Paul references the exchange that occurred at the cross when Jesus died for our sin, saying, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21), and he personally spoke of the righteousness "which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil 3:9).¹⁰ This is what Paul calls "the gift

⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine*, 40.

¹⁰ Though the word "impute" is not used in some passages, the idea is implied. Isaiah writes of the Suffering Servant Who "will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11), and of God as the

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of righteousness” (Rom 5:17). Once we receive God’s righteousness as a free gift, we are instantaneously justified in God’s sight.

Some might raise the question: *how can a holy God justify unworthy sinners?* How can He give something to someone who deserves the opposite? How is this just? The answer is found in Jesus and what He accomplished for us at the cross. At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness requires, and saves the sinner as His love desires. At the cross Jesus voluntarily died a penal substitutionary death. He willingly died in our place and bore the punishment that was rightfully ours. Our guilt became His guilt. Our shame became His shame. The result of the cross is that God is forever satisfied with the death of Christ. There’s no additional sacrifice or payment needed. Jesus paid it all. When we believe in Jesus, we are forgiven all our sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 2:13; Heb 10:10-14), and then God imputes His righteousness to us (Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). God’s righteousness is not earned; rather, it is freely gifted to us who believe in Jesus as our Savior.

It is sometimes difficult to accept this biblical teaching, because our behavior does not always reflect our righteous standing before God. However, God’s Word defines reality, and we are justified in His sight because His righteousness has been gifted to our account. The righteousness of God is credited to us who have trusted in Jesus as our Savior.

One Who “has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10). And Paul writes of “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe” (Rom 3:22), and of being “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24; cf. 5:17; 9:30; 10:3-4; 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 2:16; 3:11, 24).

Justification

Justification

At the moment of faith in Christ, God’s righteousness is gifted to the believer (Rom 5:17; cf. 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), and he is at once made right with God and declared just in His sight. Divine justification is not by human works at all, “for there is none righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10), “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Rather, Paul reveals we are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). Like our spiritual birth, justification is a one-and-done event, perfect in itself, not to be confused with our experiential sanctification, which occurs over time. According to Norman Geisler, “Justification is an instantaneous, past act of God by which one is saved from the guilt of sin—his record is cleared and he is guiltless before the Judge” (Rom 8:1).”¹ And Charles Bing states, “Justification is the act of God that declares a sinner righteous in God’s sight. It is a legal term that speaks of one’s right standing in God’s court of justice.”²

Being justified in God’s sight is by faith alone and not by any human works, for “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Rom 3:20a). Rather, “to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom 4:5), for “a man is 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

¹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 235.

² Charles C. Bing, *Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship: How to Understand Some Difficult Bible Passages* (Brenham, TX: Lucid Books, 2015).

Justification

of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Gal 2:16).³ J. I. Packer states:

Justification is a judicial act of God pardoning sinners (wicked and ungodly persons, Rom 3:9–24; 4:5), accepting them as just, and so putting permanently right their previously estranged relationship with himself. This justifying sentence is God’s gift of righteousness (Rom 5:15–17), his bestowal of a status of acceptance for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor 5:21).⁴

Louis Berkhof agrees, stating:

Justification is a judicial act of God, in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner. It is unique in the application of the work of redemption in that it is a judicial act of God, a declaration respecting the sinner, and not an act or process of renewal, such as regeneration, conversion, and sanctification. While it has respect to the sinner, it does not change his inner life. It does not affect his condition, but his state.⁵

³ Some in the early church thought righteousness came through adherence to the Mosaic Law. The apostle Paul dealt with this, saying, “if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly” (Gal 2:21), for “if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law” (Gal 3:21). Salvation comes to the one who simply trusts in Christ as Savior and receives it as a free gift, “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).

⁴ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*, 164.

⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 513.

Justification

Merrill F. Unger adds:

Justification is a divine act whereby an infinitely Holy God judicially declares a believing sinner to be righteous and acceptable before Him because Christ has borne the sinner's sin on the cross and has become "to us ... righteousness" (1 Cor 1:30; Rom 3:24). A justified believer emerges from God's great courtroom with a consciousness that another, his Substitute, has borne his guilt and that he stands without accusation before God (Rom 8:1, 33–34).⁶

Paul Enns states:

Whereas forgiveness is the negative side of salvation, justification is the positive side. To justify is to declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus Christ. It is a forensic (legal) act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous on the basis of the blood of Christ. The major emphasis of justification is positive and involves two main aspects. It involves the pardon and removal of all sins and the end of separation from God (Acts 13:39; Rom 4:6–7; 5:9–11; 2 Cor 5:19). It also involves the bestowal of righteousness upon the believing person and a title to all the blessings promised to the just. Justification is a gift given through the grace of God (Rom 3:24) and takes place the moment the individual has faith in Christ (Rom 4:2; 5:1). The ground of justification is the death of Christ (Rom 5:9), apart from any works (Rom 4:5). The means of justification is faith (Rom 5:1). Through justification God maintains His integrity and His standard, yet is able to enter into fellowship with

⁶ Merrill F. Unger, "Justification," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 729.

Justification

sinner because they have the very righteousness of Christ imputed to them.⁷

The process is faith in Christ (John 3:16; Acts 4:12; 16:31), imputed righteousness (Rom 5:17; cf. 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), and the declaration by God that the believer is now justified in God's sight (Rom 3:24; 4:5; Gal 2:16). Robert B. Thieme Jr., states:

Anyone who expresses faith alone in Christ alone is instantly justified before the bench of God's justice. The mechanics of justification follow three logical steps, though they all occur simultaneously. First, the person believes in Christ; second, God the Father credits, or imputes, His righteousness to that person; and third, God recognizes His righteousness in the believer and pronounces him "justified"—vindicated, righteous (Rom 5).⁸

The imputation of God's righteousness to believers means we are declared righteous, but not made righteous in conduct. To be righteous in conduct is the lifelong process of sanctification whereby the believer advances to spiritual maturity and lives in conformity with the character and will of God as revealed in His Word. This is the walk of faith. But though we are righteous in God's sight because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, at the same time we continue to possess a sin nature that continually causes internal temptation and conflict (Rom 6:6; 7:14-25; 13:14; Col 3:9; Gal 5:16-17, 19-22; 1 John 1:8), and we commit personal acts of sin (1 Ki 8:46; Eccl 7:20; 1 John 1:10; 2:1). Though the power of the sin nature is broken (Rom 6:11-14), the

⁷ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 326.

⁸ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. "Justification", *Thieme's Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 153.

Justification

presence of the sin nature is never removed from us until God takes us from this world and gives us a new body like the body of Jesus (Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2, 5). Martin Luther understood this duality and coined the Latin phrase *simul iustus et peccator*, which translates as, “simultaneously righteous and a sinner.” Though Christians are declared righteous in God’s sight, sin will constantly be present (Eccl 7:20; 1 John 1:8, 10), to varying degrees, depending on the status of the believer’s spiritual walk with the Lord. Timothy George states:

The believer is not only both righteous and sinful at the same time but is also always or completely both righteous and sinful at the same time. What does this mean? With respect to our fallen human condition, we are, and always will be in this life, sinners. However, for believers, life in this world is no longer a period of doubtful candidacy for God’s acceptance. In a sense we have already been before God’s judgment seat and have been acquitted on account of Christ. Hence we are also always righteous.⁹

I agree with the phrase *simul iustus et peccator*, that a Christian is “simultaneously righteous and a sinner.” I think a better phrase is *semper iustus et peccator*, that we are “always righteous and a sinner.” Both are true. Always. As a Christian, I am righteous because I have received God’s “gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17). This is “the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” in Christ (Phil 3:9). God gave me His righteousness at the moment I trusted Christ as my Savior, and like all of God’s gifts, it can’t be given back, “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). As one who possesses God’s righteousness, I am

⁹ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, Tenn., Broadman and Holman publishers, 2013), 72.

Justification

forever justified in His sight. The matter is settled in heaven. God has made it so. After being saved, the issue for every Christian is to advance to spiritual maturity (Heb 6:1), which glorifies God and edifies others.

Love

Love

Love is an intrinsic attribute of God that motivated Him to reach into time and space and offer salvation to lost sinners who have offended Him. This was a voluntary act of love on the part of God, as He was in no way compelled to act. But He did act for our benefit, and this is most pronounced in the sending of His Son to die for us. In Scripture, we are told, “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). Here, the apostle John used the Greek verb *agapao* (ἀγαπάω), which speaks of God’s love for lost sinners, and His love was manifest toward us by providing His uniquely born Son as an atoning sacrifice for sin so that we might not spend eternity in the lake of fire. Instead, we might believe in His Son and come to possess eternal life. Love here is universal, extending to all of humanity. It is gracious because the object is undeserving (Rom 5:8). It is giving, as God gave His precious Son to die for us. It is simple, being received by faith alone in Christ alone (Acts 4:12; Eph 2:8-9). And it is salvific, saving those who accept God’s Son as their Savior (John 1:12; Gal 3:26).

However, when referring to people possessed with negative volition, *agapao* (ἀγαπάω) becomes a commitment to that which is evil. John wrote, “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved [*agapao*] the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). And, he wrote of weak believers who “loved [*agapao*] the approval of men rather than the approval of God” (John 12:43). In both these passages, *agapao* denotes a commitment to that which is selfish and sinful. This commitment to evil finds similar usage in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, ca. 250 BC), where *agapao* is used of Samson who loved a prostitute (Judg 16:4), and Solomon who loved the wives that turned his heart away

Love

from the Lord (1 Ki 11:2). It is said that unbelievers “do not have the love of God” within them” (John 5:42). Their love is a commitment to self-interest and sin, which is characteristic of the world’s love. And Christians are warned, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world” (1 John 2:15), which shows that born again believers have the capacity to love that which is contrary to God.

But God, being holy, righteous, and good, cannot love anything contrary to His nature. And because God is immutable (Mal 3:6), His love never changes. This means He does not love us more at one moment and less at another. When God loves us, it means He desires our best, and that He is committed to our wellbeing and spiritual growth. Sometimes this means comforting us (2 Cor 1:3-4), but other times it means discipling us (Heb 12:6). His love is always perfect. Robert B. Thieme, Jr., states:

Divine love, like every other attribute of God, is eternal, unchanging, and unfailing (1 Ch 16:34; Psa 57:10; 136). Even God’s complete knowledge of the sins and failures of His creatures cannot disappoint, frustrate, or diminish His love. God’s love can never be compromised, for it is governed by His perfect integrity (Psa 89:14a; Jer 9:24). Infinitely superior to human love, divine love always functions in a rational manner, free from emotion and sentimentality (Ex 34:6; Psa 86:15; Eph 2:4).¹

God is interested in saving lost sinners because He loves them and wants what is best for them. In John 3:16, love is seen as that beneficial act of God, borne out of His eternal attribute of love, whereby He seeks to save lost sinners by

¹ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Essence of God”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 87.

Love

directing them to Christ as their Savior. God’s love is based entirely on His character and not in the beauty or worth of the object. The apostle Paul wrote, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). According to W. E. Vine, “In respect of *agapao* as used of God, it expresses the deep and constant ‘love’ and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects.”² And Christopher A. Beetham notes,

God is essentially love (1 John 4:8), and His purpose right from the beginning has been one of love. The love of the Father for the Son is therefore the archetype of all love. This fact is made visible in the sending and self-sacrifice of the Son (John 3:16; 1 John 3:1, 16) ...God’s primary purpose for the world is His compassionate and forgiving love, which asserts itself despite the world’s hostile rejection of it.”³

The apostle John wrote, “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). Our salvation was not earned by anything we did, but rather, by the love He showed to us by sending His Son to be the satisfying sacrifice for our sins. W. E. Vine states, “God’s love is seen in the gift of His Son (1 John 4:9-10). But obviously this is not the love of complacency, or affection, that is, it was not drawn out by any excellency in its objects (Rom 5:8). It was an exercise of the divine will in deliberate choice, made

² W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 382.

³ Christopher A. Beetham, ed., “Ἀγαπάω,” *Concise New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 111.

Love

without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself.”⁴ God loves because of who He is, as it is natural for Him to love, for “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Geisler states, “The Bible says that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16). If love is defined as ‘that which wills the good of its object,’ then God is good.”⁵

⁴ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 381–382.

⁵ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 111.

Penal Substitution

Penal Substitution

Penal substitution is the idea that Jesus bore the penalty for our sins on the cross. He was judged in our place and bore the wrath of God that rightfully belongs to us. The record of Scripture is that “He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed” (Isa 53:5), and “the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him” (Isa 53:6), for “by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11), and “the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering” (Isa 53:10a). Jesus is presented in the NT as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). We’re also told that God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf” (2 Cor 5:21), and that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us” (Gal 3:13), and that “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Pet 2:24). In this way, the sins of all humanity were imputed to Christ while He was on the cross, suffering as our substitute. And we must always remember that the sacrifice of Christ was purely voluntary, as He said, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11), and “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative” (John 10:18). And Jesus has “been offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28), and “Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust” (1 Pet 3:18).

Louis Berkhof states, “The Bible certainly teaches that the sufferings and death of Christ were vicarious, and vicarious in the strict sense of the word that He took the place of sinners, and that their guilt was imputed, and their

Penal Substitution

punishment transferred, to Him.”¹ And Charles Ryrie adds, “Only the substitutionary death of Christ can provide that which God’s justice demands and thereby become the basis for the gift of eternal life to those who believe.”² And according to Lewis Chafer, “The doctrine of satisfaction embodies the conception of Christ’s death, that it was a penal substitution which had the objective purpose of providing a just and righteous ground for God to remit the sins of those for whom Christ died.”³ John Walvoord agrees, saying:

This point of view, variously described as vicarious or penal, holds that the atonement is objectively directed toward God and the satisfaction of His holy character and demands upon the sinner. It is vicarious in the sense that Christ is the Substitute who bears the punishment rightly due sinners, their guilt being imputed to Him in such a way that He representatively bore their punishment. This is in keeping with the general idea of sacrifices in the Old Testament and is explicitly taught in the New Testament (see John 1:29; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24).⁴

Robert B. Thieme, Jr. states:

The punishment incurred by Adam when he sinned—spiritual death—is passed down to the entire human race. Everyone is born under this penalty of sin, hopelessly in debt to God. The debt has been paid by the perfect humanity of Christ, whose substitutionary spiritual death on the cross “canceled out the certificate of debt” (Col 2:14). Man now stands free to

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 376.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 357.

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 143.

⁴ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, 157.

Penal Substitution

accept Jesus Christ and receive the gift of an eternal relationship with God.⁵

What's unique about Jesus is that He is both our High Priest as well as the sacrifice for our sins. In the OT, priests would offer animals to die as the sacrifice, but Jesus offered "Himself as a guilt offering" (Isa 53:10) in order to take away sins. The writer to the Hebrews states, "Christ appeared as a high priest" (Heb 9:11), and this in order "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb 9:26), and this was a once-for-all sacrifice, as He "offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (Heb 10:12).

Sin is the breaking of God's law, for "Everyone who commits sin also breaks the law; sin is the breaking of law" (1 John 3:4 CSB). The penalty for breaking God's law is death, for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Jesus took our sins upon Himself and "bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet 2:24), and He "died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). And He died for the sins of everyone, for "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Though Christ died for everyone, the benefits of the cross are applied only to those who believe, and "everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7). Additionally, we receive "the gift of righteousness" (Rom 5:17), and "eternal life" (John 10:28). At the moment of faith in Christ, we are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24).

⁵ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. "Barrier", *Thieme's Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 22.

Propitiation

Propitiation

Jesus' death on the cross was a satisfactory sacrifice to God which completely paid the price for our sin. We owed a debt to God that we could never pay, and Jesus paid that debt in full when He died on the cross and bore the punishment that rightfully belonged to us. In Romans, Paul states that we "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith (Rom 3:24-25a ESV). Here, Paul used the Greek word *hilasterion* (ἱλαστήριον)—translated *propitiation*—to show that Jesus' shed blood completely satisfied God's righteous demands toward our sin, with the result that there is nothing more for the sinner to pay to God. Jesus paid our sin-debt in full. The Apostle John tells us "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2; cf., 4:10). Jesus' death on the cross forever satisfied God's righteous demands toward the sins of everyone for all time! God has "canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col 2:14). Regarding Christ's death, J. Dwight Pentecost states:

You can be adjusted to God's standard, because God made Christ to become sin for us. The One who knew no sin, the One in whose lips had never been found guile, took upon Himself our sin in order that He might bear our sins to the cross and offer Himself as an acceptable substitute to God for us—on our behalf, in our place. And when Jesus Christ identified Himself with sinners and went to the cross on their behalf and in their place, He was making possible the doctrine of reconciliation. He was making it possible for God to conform the world to Himself, to adjust the world to His standard so that sinners in the world might find

Propitiation

salvation because “Jesus paid it all.” You can be adjusted to God, to God’s standard, through Christ, by His death, by His cross, by His blood, and by His identification with sinners.¹

John Walvoord adds:

The work of Christ in salvation has still another major aspect of what is called in the Bible “propitiation,” “the sacrifice of atonement,” or satisfying God’s righteous demands or judgment upon a sinner. Illustrations of this can be found in Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:2; 4:10. The idea of propitiation is that God as a righteous God must demand punishment for those who sin against Him. Christ in His death on the cross provided propitiation, atonement, or satisfaction of that claim, so that God is fully satisfied now in saving a person who does not deserve to be saved.²

Robert Lightner states:

The death of Christ satisfied the righteous demands of God the Father. Because of sin His holiness had been offended, and only a sinless sacrifice could meet His righteous demands. Jesus Christ the Righteous One provided in Himself the perfect sacrifice. Paul set forth Christ as the propitiation for the remission of sins (Rom 3:25). Because of the blood He shed Christ provided in Himself the appointed place where a holy God could meet sinful man. Christ is now our place of meeting—our mercy seat (cf. 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The need for propitiation stems from the sin of man and the holiness of God. It is man who needs to be reinstated

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine*, 89.

² John F. Walvoord, *What We Believe*, 76.

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or reconciled with God. God's holiness and righteous demands remain unchanged. Since there must be a basis upon which God may receive sinners, satisfaction must be made for sin: propitiation provided just such a basis through the death of Christ.³

Paul Enns states:

Propitiation means that the death of Christ fully satisfied all the righteous demands of God toward the sinner. Because God is holy and righteous He cannot overlook sin; through the work of Jesus Christ God is fully satisfied that His righteous standard has been met. Through union with Christ the believer can now be accepted by God and be spared from the wrath of God.⁴

There are several concepts at work in the doctrine of propitiation. *First*, God is holy which means He is completely set apart from sin and cannot look on wickedness with favor. 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). Because all mankind is marked by sin, we are all in danger of the fires of hell, unless we turn to Christ as our Savior. *Second*, God made a way for His righteousness to be satisfied, and this through the cross of Christ. As Christians, we "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom 3:24-25a ESV). And John tells us "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2a; cf., 4:10). God is

³ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 195.

⁴ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 325.

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forever satisfied with the death of Christ. *Third*, the wrath of God is removed because Jesus was judged in our place and bore the punishment that rightfully belongs to us. Paul wrote, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Rom 5:8-9).

Reconciliation

Reconciliation

Atonement for sins is the basis for reconciliation, because God has judged our sins in the Person of Christ who died on the cross in our place. The death of Christ has forever satisfied God's righteous demands for our sin and it is on this basis that He can accept sinners before His throne of grace. Paul wrote, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom 5:10-11). And, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18-19). In both of these passages on reconciliation, Paul employs the Greek verb *katallassō* (καταλλάσσω), and the noun *katallage* (καταλλαγή) which, according to Louw-Nida, means "to reconcile, to make things right with one another, reconciliation."¹ But this reconciliation does not bring Him down to us, as though God is reconciled to the world. Rather, it means God has changed us, so that we are reconciled to Him, and this through the death of His Son, Jesus, Who bore our sin on the cross (Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3-4) and gives us His righteousness as a gift at the moment we trust in Christ as our Savior (Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). According to G.W. Bromiley:

God is neither reconciled to the world, nor does He reconcile Himself to it. He reconciles the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:19). He loves us even while we are

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 501.

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sinner, offering His Son so that we might be forgiven and saved from His wrath (Rom 5:8-10). But God Himself does not change. While He remains implacably opposed to sin, nevertheless, He does not abandon His love for sinners. Instead, He acts to bring about their reconciliation according to an eternal purpose.²

Paul Enns adds:

God is the one who initiated this change or reconciliation; He moved to reconcile sinful man to Himself (2 Cor 5:18, 19). On the other hand, man is the object of reconciliation. It was man who had moved out of fellowship with God; therefore, man needed to be restored. This reconciliation has been provided for the whole world, but it is effective only when it is received by personal faith.³

Because Jesus' death satisfies God's righteous demands for sin, sinners can approach God who welcomes them in love. God has cleared the way for sinners to come to Him for a new relationship, and this is based completely on the substitutionary work of Christ. God has done everything to reconcile us to Himself. The sin debt that we owed to God has been paid in full by the blood of Christ. Paul Enns states:

The emphasis of *reconciliation* is that of making peace with God. Man who was estranged from God is brought into communion with God. Sin had created a barrier between man and God and rendered man hostile toward God (Isa 59:1-2; Col 1:21, 22; Jam 4:4).

² G. W. Bromiley, "Reconcile; Reconciliation," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, 55.

³ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 324.

Reconciliation

Through Christ that enmity and the wrath of God was removed (Rom 5:10). Reconciliation may thus be defined as “God removing the barrier of sin, producing peace and enabling man to be saved.”⁴

There are two aspects of God’s reconciliation. The first is objective and is referred to as *provisional reconciliation* in which God, through the work of Jesus on the cross, makes humanity savable by means of His judgment of sin in Christ. This means God has removed the barrier that alienated us from Him. The second is subjective and is referred to as *experimental reconciliation* in which lost sinners are brought into a relationship with God when they believe in Christ as their Savior. They are, at that moment, reconciled to God. According to Robert Lightner, “Because of sin in Adam the entire human race is out of balance, at odds with God. Christ reconciled the world to himself, but each individual must appropriate that work before it benefits him (2 Cor 5:18).”⁵ Merrill F. Unger states:

By the death of Christ the world is changed in its relationship to God. Man is reconciled to God, but God is not said to be reconciled to man. By this change lost humanity is rendered savable. As a result of the changed position of the world through the death of Christ the divine attitude toward the human family can no longer be the same. God is enabled to deal with lost souls in the light of what Christ has accomplished...When an individual sees and trusts in the value of Christ’s atoning death, he becomes reconciled to God, hostility is removed, friendship and fellowship eventuate.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 324.

⁵ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 195.

⁶ Merrill F. Unger, “Reconciliation,” *The New Unger’s Bible*

Reconciliation

For those of us who have trusted Christ as our Savior, we have the privilege of sharing the gospel of grace with others, that they too might trust in Jesus as their Savior and be reconciled to God. Paul wrote that God “has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:19b-20). When we come by faith alone in Christ alone, we are fully reconciled to God.

Dictionary, 1067.

Redemption

Redemption

Redemption means a price has been paid by one person to liberate another. The Greek words *lutroō* (λυτρόω), *lutron* (λύτρον), *antilutron* (ἀντίλυτρον), and *apolutrōsis* (ἀπολύτρωσις) are used by NT writers to communicate the truth that Jesus purchased our freedom from the slave-market of sin by means of His sacrificial death on the cross. In the NT, this word group occurs 21 times and *apolutrōsis* (ἀπολύτρωσις) accounts for roughly half of those uses. Jesus said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom [*lutron*] for many” (Mark 10:45). Here, the Greek word *lutron* refers to “price of release, ransom.”¹ Prior to faith in Christ, we were held captive in Satan’s slave-market of sin, but Christ released us by His shed blood. Paul states, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption [*apolutrōsis*], the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). And, “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom [*antilutron*] for all, the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Tim 2:5-6). Paul wrote, “In Him we have redemption [*apolutrōsis*] through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7). According to BDAG, the Greek word *apolutrosis* (ἀπολύτρωσις) originally referred to “buying back a slave or captive, i.e. making free by payment of a ransom.”² Hoehner notes, “The NT usage of ἀπολύτρωσις refers to one set free on the basis of a ransom paid to God by Christ’s death.”³ According to Paul Enns, “The word is used

¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 605.

² Ibid., 117.

³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 206.

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to describe the believer being purchased out of the slave market of sin and set free from sin's bondage. The purchase price for the believer's freedom and release from sin was the death of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Rev 5:9; 14:3, 4)."⁴ The whole idea of redemption implies antecedent slavery. A slave could obtain freedom if redeemed by a free person. All humanity is enslaved to sin, Jesus being the sole exception, as He was sinless (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Since Jesus was free from sin, He was able to purchase our freedom and liberate us from our bondage to Satan and sin (Acts 26:18; Col 1:13-14). Merrill Unger states:

Redemption from this bondage is represented in the Scriptures as both universal and limited. It is universal in the sense that its advantages are freely offered to all. It is limited in the sense that it is effectual only with respect to those who meet the conditions of salvation announced in the gospel. For such it is effectual in that they receive forgiveness of sins and the power to lead a new and holy life. Satan is no longer their captor, and death has lost its sting and terror. They look forward to the redemption of the body (see Heb 2:9; Acts 3:19; Eph 1:7; Acts 26:18; 2 Tim 2:26; 1 Cor 15:55-57; Rom 8:15-23).⁵

Biblically, we observe that God's forgiveness is not arbitrary, as though He simply releases someone from their sin-debt without any payment for the offenses that were committed. Nor was the payment for sin made by us, as though we had something of worth to give to God. Peter states, "you were not redeemed [*lutroō*] with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your

⁴ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 323.

⁵ E. McChesney, "Redemption," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 1069.

Redemption

forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:18-19). God’s forgiveness was made possible by the blood of Christ, which refers to His sacrificial atoning death on the cross where He died in our place, where “Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). And the blood of Christ is the only coin of the heavenly realm that the Father accepts as payment for our sin debt. Lightner states, “The means of redemption from sin in Scripture is always through the shed blood of Christ, and is therefore related to his death (Gal 3:13; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 9:12, 15; 1 Pet 1:18–19; Rev 5:9). His sinless life demonstrated his qualification to be the sin-bearer. One flaw in his character would have disqualified him.”⁶ Harold Hoehner notes:

The OT writings very carefully indicated that the shedding of blood was involved in sacrifice. Sacrificial animals were not killed by strangulation. The shedding of blood is necessary (Lev 17:11; Eph 2:13; 1 Pet 1:19) for without it there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:22), and Paul makes it clear that God has been propitiated in Christ’s redemption, which was in connection with his blood (Rom 3:24–25), and that one is justified by means of Christ’s blood (Rom 5:9). Therefore, the ransom price in connection with deliverance was the sacrificial death of Christ.⁷

In summary, redemption means Jesus Christ paid the price to liberate us from the bondage of sin through His sacrificial death on the cross. This act of redemption is by means of His shed blood, which serves as the payment for our

⁶ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 195.

⁷ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 207.

Redemption

sin debt. At the moment of faith in Christ, we are transferred from enslavement to sin to freedom in Christ, where we enjoy forgiveness of sins and new life. While redemption is offered to all, it is effective only for those who believe in Christ as Savior.

Regeneration

Regeneration

The word “regeneration” occurs only twice in the Bible (Matt 19:28 and Tit 3:5). In both places the Greek word used is *paliggenesia* (παλιγγενεσία), which, according to BDAG, means “the state of being renewed...[the] experience of a complete change of life, rebirth of a redeemed person.”¹ Lewis S. Chafer states:

On the basis of this text [Tit. 3:5], the word “regeneration” has been chosen by theologians to express the concept of new life, new birth, spiritual resurrection, the new creation, and, in general, a reference to the new supernatural life that believers receive as sons of God. In the history of the church, the term has not always had accurate usage, but properly understood, it means the origination of the eternal life which comes into the believer in Christ at the moment of faith, the instantaneous change from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life.²

According to Charles Ryrie, “The word, used only twice in the New Testament (Matt 19:28; Tit 3:5), means to be born again. To be *born from above* (*anōthen*) occurs in John 3:3 and probably includes the idea of being born again also (see the use of *anōthen* in Gal 4:9). It is the work of God that gives new life to the one who believes.”³ Dr. Paul Enns would agree, saying, “Succinctly stated, *to regenerate* means ‘to impart life.’ Regeneration is the act whereby God imparts

¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 752.

² Lewis S. Chafer; *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan Publishing, 2010), 97-98.

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 376.

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life to the one who believes.”⁴ The Greek word *anagennao* (ἀναγεννάω) can be added as well. The word *anagennao* appears twice in Peter’s first epistle (1 Pet 1:3, 23), where it is properly translated *born again* and has the idea of imparting new life.

God is the One who imparts new life at the moment a person believes in Christ as Savior. According to Charles Ryrie, “God regenerates (John 1:13) according to His will (Jam 1:18) through the Holy Spirit (John 3:5) when a person believes (John 1:12) the Gospel as revealed in the Word (1 Pet 1:23).”⁵ Paul Enns states:

John 1:13 indicates the new birth is not effected by the will of man. Regeneration is an act of God, not a cooperative effort between God and man. That is not to say, however, that faith is unnecessary in salvation. It may be suggested that although regeneration and faith are *distinct*, they occur simultaneously. The two are set side by side in John 1:12–13. In John 1:12, at the moment of receiving Christ (believing), the person becomes a child of God; in John 1:13 it indicates that at that very moment the persons have been born of God.⁶

Biblically, there are numerous passages that place faith as the necessary prerequisite to having new life, or regeneration. It is written, “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 “This is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life” (John 6:40). In

⁴ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 338.

⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 376.

⁶ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 340.

Regeneration

these and other instances, “eternal life” is given when we believe in Jesus as our Savior. Faith is never the cause of our salvation, but rather, the means by which we receive it. Scripture 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). Faith has no saving merit at all. God saves, and He alone gets all the credit and glory.

Repentance

Repentance

In the New Testament, the Greek words *metanoia* (μετάνοια) and *metanoēō* (μετανοέω) mean to *change one's mind*.¹ According to Charles Ryrie, “Repentance means a genuine change of mind that affects the life in some way.”² This is a good understanding of the word. For unbelievers, repentance is a synonym for faith in Christ (Acts 17:30; 2 Tim 2:25; 2 Pet 3:9), and when they trust in Jesus alone as Savior (John 3:16; Acts 4:12), it results in forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), and eternal life (John 10:28), which positively affects their life for eternity. For Christians, repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of behavior in which they turn from their sin and pursue righteousness (Rev 2:5, 16, 21-22; 3:3, 19),³ which God expects of all His children (Eph 5:8-9; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:16).

Does Sorrow Accompany Repentance?

¹ In the Old Testament, *repent* translates the Hebrew verb *nacham* (נָחַם), which, in certain passages, means to *change one's mind*, and was used of the Lord who changed His mind about an action He was going to take (Ex 32:12-14; Jon 3:10). In the Septuagint (i.e., the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT), the translators used the Greek verb *metanoēō* (μετανοέω) as a synonym for the Hebrew verb *nacham*.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 389.

³ This would correspond to the meaning of the Hebrew verb *shuv* (שׁוּב), which means to *turn; return, or go back*. *Shuv* is used of God's people responding positively to His discipline and returning to Him in obedience (Deut 30:1-3, 9-10). Interestingly, *shuv* is used of a righteous person who *turns to* a life of iniquity (Ezek 3:20, 18:24, 26; 33:18). The Septuagint translators chose the Greek verb *epistrephō* (ἐπιστρέφω) as a synonym for *shuv*. Like *shuv*, *epistrephō* means to *turn, turn back, or go back*. In the Septuagint, there is not a single instance where *metanoēō* is used to translate the Hebrew verb *shuv*.

Repentance

Is there sorrow that leads to repentance? Yes, there can be true sorrow that leads to repentance. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul said, “the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor 7:10). Though sorrow may lead to repentance, it does not always do so, as “the sorrow of the world produces death” and not salvation (2 Cor 7:10b). That is, one may be sorrowful, and yet never turn to Christ. Judas, when he betrayed Christ, “felt remorse” for his actions (Matt 27:3), and then “went away and hanged himself” (Matt 27:5). Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes, “If repentance is used merely as a synonym for believing in the Messiah—the way the Bible uses it—only in that sense is it truly a condition for salvation. But if—as some groups use it—repentance means ‘to feel sorry for one’s sins,’ then it indeed becomes a false addition to salvation.”⁴ According to Charles Ryrie, “The only kind of repentance that saves is a change of mind about Jesus Christ. People can weep; people can resolve to turn from their past sins; but those things in themselves cannot save. The only kind of repentance that saves anyone, anywhere, anytime is a change of mind about Jesus Christ.”⁵

Repentance for Salvation

Is repentance necessary for eternal salvation? Yes, repentance is necessary concerning salvation if one understands it to mean having *a change of mind* about salvation being obtained solely in Christ. Unbelievers cannot stop sinning, which means they cannot save themselves, and their good works have no saving merit (Isa 64:6; Gal 2:16;

⁴ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Faith Alone: The Condition of Our Salvation*, 92.

⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 85.

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Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). The lost need to understand that salvation is 100% in Christ alone. Peter said, “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). And when the Philippian Jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30), the simple reply was given, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). The gospel is simple. It means believing in the One who died for our sins, was buried, and raised again on the third day, as Scripture teaches (1 Cor 15:3-4). And salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (John 3:16), and not by any human effort (Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5), for “the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom 4:5). For Christians, turning from a life of sin and producing good works should follow salvation (Eph 2:10; Gal 6:10), but they are never a condition of it. Robert B. Thieme Jr., states, “Salvation repentance occurs when the unbeliever hears the Gospel, understands it, and makes a decision to accept Christ’s saving work (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30; 2 Pet 3:9). Believing in the Gospel message and repenting inherently operate together (Acts 20:21; Mark 1:14–15).”⁶ Charles Ryrie states, “Repentance may prepare the way for faith, but it is faith that saves, not repentance.”⁷

What repentance means in a salvific sense is that people learn God is holy (Psa 99:9; Isa 6:3), that He “cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Hab 1:13; cf., 1 John 1:5), and can only condemn sin. Scripture reveals that everyone is sinful, “for there is no man who does not sin” (1 Ki 8:46; cf., Eccl 7:20), and “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

⁶ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. “Repentance”, *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 218.

⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 90.

Repentance

The Bible reveals “there is none righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10), that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), and that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). The picture of mankind is that we are *helpless, ungodly, sinners*, and *enemies* of God, (Rom 5:6, 8,10), spiritually dead before God (Eph 2:1; Col 2:13). Furthermore, our good works have no saving merit in God’s sight (Isa 64:6; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). This means we have no personal ability to save ourselves. None whatsoever.

Despite this grim reality, God solved the sin problem and made a way for everyone to be saved. God provided a solution to the problem of sin, and that solution is Christ and what He accomplished at the cross (1 Cor 1:18; 15:3-4). Nearly two thousand years ago, God the Son—the second Person of the Trinity—came into the world by human birth (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:26-35), lived a perfectly sinless life (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5), willingly died in our place (Isa 53:10; John 10:18), and bore the punishment for our sins (Mark 10:45; Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 1 Pet 3:18). As a result of Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross (Mark 10:45; Rom 5:8; 1 Pet 3:18), God the Father is fully satisfied with Christ’s sacrificial death on behalf of everyone (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), and that salvation is offered to everyone (John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4; 4:10; 2 Pet 3:9), as a gift (Rom 3:24), by grace alone (Eph 2:8-9), through faith alone (Rom 3:28; 4:4-5; Gal 3:26), in Christ (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12). Upon hearing this good news, the unsaved can *change their minds* and place their faith solely in Christ as their Savior (Acts 4:12; 16:31). When people place their faith in Christ alone, they receive “forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43b; cf., Eph 1:7; Col 1:14), the gift of “eternal life” (John 10:18), “the gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17; cf., 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), are “reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20), have “peace with God” (Rom 5:1), become “children of God” (Gal 3:26), and are “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). That’s good news.

Repentance

Sin

Sin

Our salvation is necessary because of the problem of sin. The word *sin* is found throughout Scripture, and both the Hebrew and Greek share the same basic meaning. The Hebrew word *chata* (חָטָא) means “to miss the target, or to lose the way,”¹ and the Greek word *hamartanō* (ἁμαρτάνω) is defined as “miss the mark, err, or do wrong.”² In Judges 20:16 the Hebrew word is used of skilled soldiers who do not *miss their target*, and in Proverbs 19:2 of a man who hurries and *misses his way*.³ Sin is when we transgress God’s law and depart from His intended path.⁴ The apostle John states, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and **sin is lawlessness**” (1 John 3:4). Sin is a failure to conform to the holy character of God, a deviation from His righteous will.

Divine laws are a reflection of the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God may be defined as the intrinsic, immutable, moral perfection of God, from which He

¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 305.

² William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 49.

³ G. Herbert Livingston, “638 חָטָא,” et al, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 277.

⁴ Other Hebrew and Greek words related to sin include: *evil* (עָרָא – Gen 3:5), *wicked* (עָשָׂרָא *rasha* – Prov 15:9), *rebel* (הִרְגִּז *marah* – Deut 1:26), *transgress* (עָשָׂה *pasha* – Isa 1:2), *iniquity* (יָצָא *avon* – Isa 53:6), *error* (הִלָּשָׁה *shagah* – Lev 4:13), *guilt* (עָשָׂה *asham* – Lev 4:22), *go astray* (הִלָּשָׁה *taah* – Psa 58:3), *sin* (ἁμαρτία *hamartia* – 1 Cor 15:3), *bad* (κακός *kakos* – Rom 12:17), *evil* (πονηρός *poneros* – Matt 7:11), *ungodly* (ἀσεβής *asebes* – Rom 4:5), *guilty* (ἔνοχος *enochos* – 1 Cor 11:27), *unrighteousness* (ἀδικία *adikia* – Rom 1:18), *lawless* (ἄνομος *anomos* – 1 Tim 1:9), *transgression* (παράβασις *parabasis* – Gal 3:19), *ignorance* (ἀγνοέω *agnoeo* – Acts 17:23), *go astray* (πλανάω *planao* – 1 Pet 2:25), *trespass* (παράπτωμα *paraptoma* – Rom 5:15), and *hypocrisy* (ὑπόκρισις *hypokrisis* – 1 Tim 4:2).

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commands all things, in heaven and earth, and declares as good that which conforms to His righteousness and as evil that which deviates. God's character is the basis upon which all just laws derive; either divine laws from God Himself or human laws which conform to His righteousness.⁵ Merrill F. Unger states:

The underlying idea of sin is that of law and of a lawgiver. The lawgiver is God. Hence sin is everything in the disposition and purpose and conduct of God's moral creatures that is contrary to the expressed will of God (Rom 3:20; 4:15; 7:7; Jam 4:12, 17). The sinfulness of sin lies in the fact that it is against God, even when the wrong we do is to others or ourselves (Gen 39:9; Psa 51:4).⁶

Robert B. Thieme Jr. states:

Man's sin is disobedience to, or falling away from, God's perfect standard and expressed will. Regardless of the sinner's action or intent, all sin is ultimately directed against God (Gen 39:9; Psa 51:4). The temptation for sin comes from the sin nature, but only when volition consents is the sin committed. Knowingly or unknowingly, man transgresses divine standards because he wills to do so.⁷

⁵ If there is no God, then there is no absolute standard for right and wrong and we are left with arbitrary laws based on manufactured values.

⁶ Merrill F. Unger, "Sin," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 1198.

⁷ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. "Personal Sin", *Thieme's Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, 196.

Sin

The First Sin

God is sovereign and permits sin, but is never the author of it. Sin is the expression of a creaturely will that is set against God. The first sin occurred in heaven, by Lucifer, an angel of the class of cherubim. Scripture reveals that Lucifer “had the seal of perfection, and was full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (Ezek 28:12). Lucifer personally served in the presence of God (Ezek 28:13-14), until he sinned. God said of him, “You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you” (Ezek 28:15). Being the first creature to fall away from God, his sin was purely volitional and self-actuated, as there was no temptation or sin apart from the first sin he committed. And the first sin he committed was a mental attitude sin, as God says of him, “You were internally filled with violence, and you sinned” (Ezek 28:16). Satan’s violence was connected with his pride, as the Lord states, “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor” (Ezek 28:17). Satan is brilliant in mind and appearance, but his pride is his weakness, as it corrupts his ability to reason. And Satan, having an inflated sense of himself, thought he could be God, and sought to usurp the Lord’s place over the creation (Isa 14:12-14). Satan also convinced a third of the angels to follow him in his rebellion (Rev 12:4, 7). Satan operates from a base of power, which takes priority over all else. And he will employ reason to the degree that it accommodates his power; however, if his power is threatened, he will abandon reason and resort to lies, manipulation, and brute force if needed.

The Fall of Humanity

Satan’s kingdom of darkness was expanded to include the earth when he persuaded Adam and Eve to follow him rather than God (Gen 3:1-8). The first human sin occurred in the Garden of Eden. God had warned Adam and Eve, saying,

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“from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil **you shall not eat**, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen 2:17). The warning was that if they disobeyed God, on that very day, they would die. When Satan came into the Garden of Eden, he engaged Eve through discussion, posing a question, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Gen 3:1), and after hearing Eve’s reply (Gen 3:2-3), Satan responded, “You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4-5). Of course, this was a bold lie, and Eve, rather than trust the Lord, trusted Satan, and “she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate” (Gen 3:6). Adam and Eve experienced spiritual death at the moment they disobeyed God (Gen 3:7). Though both sinned, Adam’s act of disobedience was greater than Eve’s because he was the spiritual head of the marriage, and whereas Eve was deceived (1 Tim 2:14), Adam was not deceived. Because of Adam’s disobedience, sin and death were introduced into the human race (Gen 3:1-7; Rom 5:12, 18-19; 1 Cor 15:22).

At the time of the fall (Gen 3:1-6), the first humans—God’s theocratic administrators (Gen 1:26-28)—gave Satan the title deed to the earth (Luke 4:6). This explains why Jesus referred to Satan as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). And other passages of Scripture call Satan “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4), and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), informing us “that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Satan rules by deception, oppression, and enslavement. Scripture reveals he has “weakened the nations” (Isa 14:12), and currently “deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9; cf. Rev 20:3). And because he is a finite creature, he relies on others—fallen angels and people—to help him advance his *kosmos* world-system (1 John 2:15-16), a philosophical and moral structure that is inherently and systemically corrupt, hostile to God, and completely opposed to anything divine.

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As Christians living in Satan's world system, who still retain our sinful flesh (Rom 6:6; 13:14; Gal 5:17, 19; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9), we are constantly tempted to sin and act contrary to the character and will of God. The sin we commit may be mental, verbal, or physical. It may be private or public, impacting one or many, with short or lasting results. Below are biblical examples of sin:

1. Adam and Eve disobeyed the command not to eat the fruit from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-7).
2. Lot's daughters got him drunk and had sex with him (Gen 19:30-38).
3. Aaron led the Israelites to worship an idol (Ex 32:1-6).
4. Moses struck the rock when the Lord told him to speak to it (Num 20:8-12).
5. Samson slept with prostitutes (Judg 16:1-4).
6. David had an affair with Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, murdered (2 Sam 11:1-21).
7. Solomon worshiped idols (1 Ki 11:1-10).
8. James and John (nicknamed Boanerges, or "Sons of Thunder"; Mark 3:17) wanted to call fire down from heaven to kill the residents of a Samaritan city (Luke 9:51-55).
9. The mother of James and John requested special treatment for her sons, that they might have a place of prominence seated on thrones to the right and left of Jesus (Matt 20:20-21). This upset the other disciples (Matt 20:24).
10. The disciples argued amongst themselves as to who was greatest in the kingdom (Luke 9:46).
11. Peter tried to prevent Jesus from going to the cross (Matt 16:21-23).
12. Peter publicly denied the Lord three times (Matt 26:34-35; 69-75).

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13. The Christians at Corinth engaged in quarrels (1 Cor 1:11), jealousy and strife (1 Cor 3:1-3), fornication (1 Cor. 5:1-2), selfishness and drunkenness (1 Cor 11:21).
14. Peter engaged in hypocrisy and was publicly rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14).
15. The Apostle John twice worshipped an angel and was rebuked for it (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9).

The above list is just a sampling of sins in the Bible. Biblically, every person is a sinner in God's sight (1 Ki 8:46; Prov 20:9; Isa 53:6; Rom 3:9-10; 23; 5:12, 18-19). Jesus is the single exception. Jesus, because of His divine nature (John 1:1, 14; Col 2:9), and the virgin conception (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:30-35), is the only person ever born without sin and who committed no sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). His perfect humanity and sinless life qualified Him to go to the cross and die in our place. Sin separates us from God and renders us helpless to merit God's approval. 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. Sadly, many people buy into the lie that they can help save themselves by doing good works. The biblical teaching is that salvation is never based on good works or adherence to law, but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 16:31). Scripture states, 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; cf. Rom 3:20, 28), for "if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal 2:21).

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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.”⁸ And 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 trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1), having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph 2:12), and unrighteous (Rom 1:19-32).”⁹ It matters little what people think of themselves. God provides the only true estimation of people, and His Word declares that we are utterly lost in sin and helpless to save ourselves. According to Lewis Chafer:

The greatest problem for the infinite God was to provide the reconciliation of the cross: the greatest problem for man is simply to believe the record in its fullness. To reject the Savior is not only to refuse the gracious love of God, but is to elect, so far as one can do, to remain under the full guilt of every sin as though no Savior had been provided, or no sacrifice had been made. No more terrible sin can be conceived of than the sin of rejecting Christ.¹⁰

Salvation from Sin and its Consequences

Eternal salvation is available to us because Jesus went to the cross and died in our place and bore the punishment that

⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, 181.

⁹ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 188.

¹⁰ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Salvation*, 52–53.

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rightfully belongs to us. God is holy, and we are guilty sinners who stand condemned before Him, contaminated by sin and utterly helpless to change our fallen condition (Rom 5:6-8). But God is love (1 John 4:8), and He loves us so much that He sent His Son into the world to pay the sin debt we cannot pay. We're told that "God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9). And because of Jesus' death on the cross, God "canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col 2:14). Jesus paid our sin debt in full, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18a). There's nothing for us to add to Jesus' work on the cross. The sole condition of salvation is to believe in Christ as our Savior. The good news is that Jesus died for us, was buried, and rose again on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4). Salvation is not Jesus plus anything we do. It's Jesus alone. He saves. Our contribution to the cross was sin and death, as Jesus took our sin upon Himself and died in our place. Salvation is never what we do for God; rather, it's what He's done for us through the cross of Christ. That's all. It's a gift that is received by faith alone in Christ alone, for "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). And God's gift is available to everyone, for "whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The matter is simple: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Total Depravity

Total Depravity

Total depravity is the biblical doctrine that sin permeates all aspects of our being—mind, will, and sensibilities, and renders us helpless to save ourselves. It 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). Salvation does not come by human works; rather, 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

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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 standards, 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 Charles 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.”¹

Calvinist View of Total Depravity

For Calvinists, total depravity means *total inability*. They regard people as totally unable to respond to the things of God; like a physical corpse. Notable scholars such as B. B. Warfield, R. C. Sproul, John Piper, Wayne Grudem, John Frame, John MacArthur, and J. I. Packer hold this view. B. B. Warfield wrote, “nothing is more fundamental in the doctrine of the Reformers than the complete inability of man and his absolute need of divine grace.”² John Frame states, “We can never come to God out of our own resources. We are helpless to do anything to save ourselves. This condition is sometimes called *total inability*” (italics his).³ J. I. Packer states, “Total depravity entails total inability, that is, the state of not having it in oneself to respond to God and his Word in a sincere and

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 253.

² Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation: Five Lectures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1915), 44.

³ John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 112.

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wholehearted way (John 6:44; Rom 8:7–8).”⁴ That is, lost sinners cannot respond to God at all, as they are spiritually unable (dead) to respond apart from God’s granting life and the ability to believe. This leads Calvinists to conclude two things. *First*, God sovereignly acts by Himself to regenerate the spiritually dead and make them spiritually alive. *Second*, God gives the newly regenerate a special kind of faith whereby they can and will trust in Christ as Savior. According to Wayne Grudem, regeneration is “the act of God awakening spiritual life within us, bringing us from spiritual death to spiritual life. On this definition, it is natural to understand that regeneration comes before saving faith. It is in fact this work of God that gives us the spiritual ability to respond to God in faith.”⁵ According to John MacArthur, “Our response in salvation is faith, but even that is not of ourselves [but is] the gift of God. Faith is nothing that we do in our own power or by our own resources...Paul intends to emphasize that even faith is not from us apart from God’s giving it.”⁶ The result of these divine actions in God’s elect means they will produce good works and will persevere in those works throughout their lives until they die. John MacArthur states, “The same power that created us in Christ Jesus empowers us to do the good works for which He has redeemed us. These are the verifiers of true salvation.”⁷ Thus, good works from regeneration to the end of one’s life are the proof of salvation. Failure to produce ongoing good works until the end of one’s life is offered as proof he was never saved (Matt 7:21).

⁴ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 84.

⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 702.

⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* on Ephesians (Chicago, Ill. Moody Press, 1986), 98.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

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The Biblical View of Total Depravity

The correct biblical view is that *total depravity* means *total unworthiness*, not *total inability* to respond in faith to God's offer of salvation. Despite the profound impact of sin on human nature, the Bible does not portray people as entirely incapacitated. Yes, all mankind is "dead" in their sins (Eph 2:1); but death does not mean total inability, but total separation from God, for even those who were dead still "walked according to the course of this world" (Eph 2:2). Mankind is totally depraved in the sense that sin corrupts every part of our being, intellect, will, and sensibility. However, it does not mean that fallen people are unable to respond in faith to the gospel of grace.

The first example of spiritual death in the Bible is found in the Garden of Eden. God had warned Adam and Eve, saying, "from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for **in the day that you eat from it you will surely die**" (Gen 2:17). The warning was that if they disobeyed God, on that very day, they would die (and death means separation, not cessation). Adam and Eve experienced spiritual death at the moment they disobeyed God. Yet, immediately after the fall, in their state of spiritual death, they could sense God's presence in the Garden, as they "heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden" (Gen 3:8). Furthermore, Adam heard God's voice when He "called to the man" (Gen 3:9), and Adam responded to Him, saying, "I heard the sound of You in the garden" (Gen 3:10a). Though they could not undo their newly fallen sinful state, it did not render them totally unable to perceive God or to respond to Him when He called out to them. And they did respond positively to the Lord when He promised to provide a descendant, a Seed of the woman, who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). They also responded positively by accepting God's provision of clothing after He killed an animal, took its skin, and covered their nakedness (Gen 3:21).

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Furthermore, God made mankind in His image, as Scripture states, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27). Even after the historic fall of Adam and Eve, all people are said to be “in the image of God” (Gen 9:6), and “in the likeness of God” (Jam 3:9). Despite the fall of humanity into sin, the image of God in humanity remains intact, implying that humans still retain some moral capacity, which includes the ability to accept God’s offer of salvation by faith. Though people are deeply affected by sin, they still possess some capacity for moral choice and responsibility, thus arguing against the notion of total depravity meaning total inability.

Regeneration is entirely the work of God in saving lost sinners who cannot save themselves (Rom 5:6-10). The sinner brings nothing of worth to salvation, but receives all that God has to offer by grace. John Walvoord states, “Regeneration is wholly of God. No possible human effort however noble can supply eternal life.”⁸ Paul Enns states, “Succinctly stated, *to regenerate* means ‘to impart life.’ Regeneration is the act whereby God imparts life to the one who believes.”⁹ Regeneration occurs in the one who believes in Christ as Savior. According to Charles Ryrie, “Salvation is always through faith, not because of faith (Eph 2:8). Faith is the channel through which we receive God’s gift of eternal life; it is not the cause. This is so man can never boast, even of his faith. But faith is the necessary and only channel (John 5:24; 17:3).”¹⁰ The Bible teaches there is only one kind of faith, and that only those who place their faith in Christ will be saved. Faith does not save. Christ saves. The Strict-Calvinist believes

⁸ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 132.

⁹ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 338.

¹⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 377.

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there are two kinds of faith, one that is common to all, and another that is special and imparted only to God's elect.

Believe to Receive Eternal Life

There are numerous passages in the Bible that place faith as the necessary prerequisite to regeneration. It is written, "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 Jesus said, "This is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life" (John 6:40), and "he who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). Paul wrote to Timothy about "those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Tim 1:16). In these and other instances, "eternal life" is given after we believe in Jesus as our Savior. Furthermore, people are condemned, not because God has not made a way for them to be saved, but because of their unwillingness to come to Christ as Savior. The issue is individual choice, not inability. The apostle John said, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, **because** he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Jesus, speaking to unsaved persons, said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). Jesus said the Holy Spirit convicts everyone of sin (John 16:8), particularly the sin of unbelief, "because they do not believe in Me" (John 16:9). There is only one sin that keeps a person out of heaven, and that is the sin of unbelief; of rejecting Jesus as the only Savior. Apparently unbelievers may resist the Holy Spirit, as Stephen said in his sermon, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51a).

Scripture reveals that "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30). This

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means they must not trust in themselves or any system of good works to save, but must trust in Christ, and Christ alone to save. Faith does not save. Christ saves. Faith is the non-meritorious instrument by which we receive eternal life. The Strict-Calvinist believes Christ died only for the elect (Matt 1:21; John 10:15), and only the elect are savable. The Bible teaches that Christ died for everyone (John 3:16; Heb 2:9; 1 John 2:2); therefore, everyone is savable. Paul said, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Tit 2:11), and that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Peter stated, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). Anyone can be saved by believing the gospel message “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 is Free from Sin

Concerning total depravity and the transmission of original sin, Jesus is the sole exception, for Mary’s virgin conception (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:30-35) 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, which includes forgiveness

Total Depravity

of sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), the gift of righteousness (Rom 5:17; Phil 3:9), and eternal life (John 10:28).

Unlimited Atonement

Unlimited Atonement

Unlimited atonement is the view from Scripture that Jesus died for everyone, and even though His death is sufficient to save everyone, the benefits of the cross are applied only to those who believe in Him as Savior. In contrast to this is the teaching of limited atonement, that Christ died only for those whom God has elected to salvation. Though there are Christians who hold to limited atonement, and have written well on other theological matters, it is the view of this writer that they err on this subject, relying more on human logic than the testimony of Scripture. Arnold Fruchtenbaum states, “Those who hold to limited atonement do not come to their conclusion based upon the exegesis of Scripture because the fact is that there is no passage anywhere in the Bible that says He died only for the elect...The defense for limited atonement is not based upon exegesis; it is based upon logic.”¹ According to David Allen:

Limited atonement is a doctrine in search of a text. No one can point to any text in Scripture that states clearly and unequivocally that Christ died for the sins of a limited number of people to the exclusion of others. Most Calvinists admit this. Alternatively, a dozen clear texts in the New Testament explicitly affirm Christ died for the sins of all people, and another half dozen plus that indirectly suggest it.²

Jesus’ atonement for sins is the basis for reconciliation, because God has judged our sins in the Person of Christ who died on the cross in our place. Jesus is “the

¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *God’s Will & Man’s Will: Predestination, Election, & Free Will*, 44.

² David L. Allen, “A Critique of Limited Atonement,” in *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique*, 71.

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Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29), and “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4), and “who gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:6), and tasted “death for everyone” (Heb 2:9), and “is the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Tim 4:10), “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Tit 2:11), and “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2; cf., 1 John 4:10), and “the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). Peter wrote of “false prophets” and “false teachers” who “deny the Master who bought them” (2 Pet 2:1).

Because Christ died for everyone, everyone is savable. But though the death of Christ is sufficient to save everyone, only those who believe will benefit from His work on the cross. And when people believe in Jesus, accepting the fact He died for their sins, was buried, and raised again on the third day, they receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), the gift of righteousness (Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), and the eternal life (John 3:16; 10:28). Human volition is the key, as “God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30). This means they must not trust in themselves or any system of good works to save, but trust in Christ alone to save.

Biblically, we should understand that Jesus is the God-Man (Isa 7:14; John 1:1, 14; Heb 1:8), that “in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9). Furthermore, He was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:30-35; Gal 4:4), was born without the taint of sin and lived a sinless life (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5), which qualified Him to go to the cross and pay the ransom price for our sins by means of His shed blood (Mark 10:45; 1 Tim 2:6; 1 Pet 1:18-19). When the divinely appointed time came for Him to go to the cross (John 12:23;

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13:1), Jesus willingly went and died in our place and paid the penalty for our sins (John 10:18; Rom 5:8). Peter wrote, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). After Jesus paid for our sins, “He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit” (John 19:30). Jesus died, was placed in a grave, and was resurrected to life on the third day (Acts 2:23-24; 4:10; 10:40; 1 Cor 15:3-4), never to die again (Rom 6:9). Salvation is now available to everyone, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The only sin that keeps a person out of heaven is the sin of unbelief. The apostle John wrote, “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Jesus, speaking to unsaved persons, said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). And Jesus pointed out that the world as a whole is convicted by God the Holy Spirit of one sin, the sin of unbelief, “because they do not believe in Me” (John 16:9). For those who reject Christ as Savior, their future is one of eternal separation and punishment away from God for all eternity, for “if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). This need not happen. Hell is avoidable to the one who trusts in Christ as Savior, believing the gospel message “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). And this salvation is a gift from God (Rom 3:24; 6:23), offered by grace alone (Eph 2:8-9), through faith alone (Gal 2:16; 3:26; 2 Tim 3:15), in Christ alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), totally apart from human works (Rom 4:5; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). Once we understand who Christ is and what He’s accomplished for us on the cross, we can then exercise our faith by trusting in

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Him as our Savior (and not a fake Jesus like that of Mormon's and Jehovah Witnesses). Once we have trusted in Christ for salvation, God then bestows on us forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), the gift of righteousness (Rom 5:17; Phil 3:9), eternal life (John 10:28), and many other blessings (Eph 1:3). For lost sinners, the matter is simple, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

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