



Soteriology

Introduction to Soteriology

Lesson Overview: Introduction, What is Soteriology, What is the Purpose of Salvation, and Previewing the Order of Salvation.

Introduction:

Soteriology—the doctrine of salvation—stands at the heart of Christian theology. It tells the story of how God restores what was lost in Adam and brings sinners into fellowship with Himself. It examines the person and work of Christ, tracing the Father’s redemptive plan. In this lesson, we’ll survey those central doctrines, compare the major frameworks, and consider how a biblical understanding of salvation shapes worship, assurance, and missions.

I. What is Soteriology?

A. Definition: Soteriology is the doctrine of [salvation](#).

1. “The term soteriology is from *sōtēria* and *logos* and means the doctrine of salvation.”¹
2. “In coming to the doctrine of soteriology, the student of Scripture arrives at the pinnacle of Christian theology because the themes and topics addressed in the study of salvation run to the very heart of the gospel and to the center of redemptive history.”²
 - Man was created in God’s image to rule creation in fellowship with Him, but through Adam’s sin, all humanity became guilty, alienated from God, and subject to death. Yet God, in His grace, has acted to redeem and save those who believe.
3. The doctrine of salvation is of utmost importance to the believer. It helps them to grow in their understanding of what excellent work God has wrought in their lives.
4. Soteriology “is one of the grandest themes in the Scriptures. It embraces all of time as well as eternity past and future. It relates in one way or another to all of mankind, without exception. It even has ramifications in the sphere of the angels. It is the theme of both the Old and New Testaments. It is personal, national, and cosmic. And it centers on the greatest Person, our Lord Jesus Christ.”³

B. What is included in the doctrine of salvation?

1. Being the study of salvation, soteriology encompasses every aspect of man’s redemption. From the Father’s redemptive plan from eternity past to the perfect union of the believers with Christ in eternity future, soteriology is involved.
2. [In our class, we aim to cover a vast range of topics in soteriology, but we do not claim to teach all that there is to know.](#) This topic has been written about, debated, thought through, and developed for millennia. We will still be enamored with the truth of our salvation for all eternity.

¹ John Miley, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1893), 65.

² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 485.

³ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 318–319.

3. Soteriology includes but isn't limited to: election and reprobation, atonement, calling and regeneration, repentance and faith, union with Christ, justification, adoption, sanctification, the perseverance of the saints, and glorification.⁴

II. What is the Purpose of Salvation?

A. Why are people saved? [Why does God redeem people at all?](#)

1. "Because believers receive such immense blessings at the hand of God's saving grace, it is a common misconception to assume that God's chief regard in salvation is to sinners themselves. The privilege of being chosen by God for salvation on the basis of nothing in oneself; of being provided a substitute of such worthiness and honor as the Son of God Himself; of receiving the gift of the new birth apart from any works of one's own; of being united to Christ, declared righteous apart from works, adopted into the family of God, and conformed into His image, progressively on earth and perfectly in heaven—the flood of gracious benefits that man enjoys in salvation tempts the student of Scripture to believe that God's saving love terminates ultimately on man."⁵
2. Isn't that what John 3:16 teaches?

† **John 3:16** — *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

B. Why would saving sinners be an inadequate purpose?

1. If God's purpose in salvation was saving sinners, then would He have accomplished that purpose completely?
2. Would God fail in accomplishing His purpose since not all sinners come to repentance?
3. If saving sinners was the purpose of salvation, then why doesn't God just save everyone?

C. So, what is the purpose of soteriology?

1. "Scripture reveals that salvation is not man-centered but [God-centered](#). God saves sinners for 'the praise of His glorious grace' (Eph. 1:6)."⁶
2. "God loves us not in a way that makes us supreme, but makes Himself supreme. Heaven will not be a hall of mirrors but an increasing vision of infinite greatness. Getting to heaven and finding that we are supreme would be the ultimate letdown. The greatest love makes sure that God does everything in such a way as to uphold and magnify His own supremacy so that when we get there, we have something to increase our joy forever—God's glory."⁷
3. God's purpose in saving sinners is His own [glory](#).

† **Psalm 79:9** — *Help us, O God of our salvation, **for the glory of thy name**: And deliver us, and purge away our sins, **for thy name's sake**.*

† **Psalm 25:11** — ***For thy name's sake**, O LORD, Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.*

† **Isaiah 43:25** — *I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions **for mine own sake**, And will not remember thy sins.*

⁴ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 486.

⁵ Ibid., 486.

⁶ Ibid., 486.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/JohnPiper>. 2008. "Why It Matters That God Does Everything for His Own Glory." Desiring God. June 20, 2008. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-it-matters-that-god-does-everything-for-his-own-glory?>

† **Romans 3:25–26 (ESV)** — ²⁵ *whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.* ²⁶ *It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

† **1 John 2:12** — *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you **for his name’s sake**.*

† **Ephesians 1:4–6** — ⁴ *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:* ⁵ *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,* ⁶ ***To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.***

4. “Though man is the recipient of God’s great love in salvation (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4), he is not the ultimate concern of God’s saving grace. God Himself and the glory of His name are uppermost in God’s affections. Any view of salvation that exalts man as God’s chief regard necessarily denigrates the glory of God.”⁸

III. The Order of Salvation Preview

A. Ordo Salutis

1. “The ordo salutis, a Latin phrase that means ‘order of salvation,’ aims to define the logical and chronological relationships between the various stages of the application of redemption.”⁹
 - “It is important to recognize this distinction between logical and chronological order. For example, when theologians posit that regeneration precedes faith in the *ordo salutis*, in most cases they are not suggesting that a gap of time separates the two, as if someone may be born again for several months and then later come to faith in Christ. Rather, they are saying that there is a causal relationship between the two, namely, that regeneration is the logical cause of faith. Though they are temporally simultaneous, occurring in the exact same moment, they are logically distinct. To say that regeneration precedes faith, then, is merely to say that one must be born again in order to believe, rather than that he must believe in order to be born again. This distinction between logical and chronological order must be kept in mind if one is to have any hope of understanding the *ordo salutis*.”¹⁰
2. There are two distinct views of the order of salvation in Church history. These views differ on the efficient agents in man’s conversion.

B. Monergism

1. Definition: “The view that regeneration is accomplished exclusively by the working of God.”¹¹
2. From the Greek monos (alone) + ergon (work) = God alone works
3. Reformed and Calvinists hold this position. Resources that promote this position are but aren’t limited to:

⁸ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 487.

⁹ Ibid., 567.

¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹ Ibid., 933.

- a. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3 (esp. 3.21–3.24 on predestination & effectual calling).
- b. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), pp. 468–477.
- c. R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1986).
- 4. “This position derives from the Protestant principle of sola gratia (by grace alone) and affirms the sole agency of God throughout the entire ordo salutis.”¹²
- 5. Proponents of this position seek to maintain the integrity of justification by faith alone, and they reject all forms of Pelagianism, particularly the merit of good works in salvation.
 - a. Pelagianism comes from the teachings of a British monk, Pelagius, who lived in the late 4th and early 5th centuries. “Pelagianism taught that people are capable of avoiding sin and choosing to live righteous lives even apart from God’s grace. Pelagius rejected the ideas of original sin and predestination. He believed that people were not inherently sinful and that they were able to live holy lives in accordance with God’s will and merit salvation by good works.”¹³
 - b. Those who hold to monergism believe that “the will of sinful man has not the least inclination towards holiness, nor any power to act in a holy manner, until it has been acted upon by divine grace; and therefore it cannot be said with strictness to co-operate with the Holy Spirit, since it acts in conversion only after it is quickened by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴
- 6. The Monergistic order of salvation is typically as follows:
 - a. Election (God’s choice of people to be saved)
 - b. The gospel call (proclaiming the message of the gospel)
 - c. Regeneration (being born again)
 - d. Conversion (faith and repentance)
 - e. Justification (right legal standing)
 - f. Adoption (membership in God’s family)
 - g. Sanctification (right conduct of life)
 - h. Perseverance (remaining a Christian)
 - i. Death (going to be with the Lord)
 - j. Glorification (receiving a resurrection body)¹⁵
 - i. Note: the order of salvation is attempting to be both the chronological and logical order of which salvation happens.

C. Synergism

- 1. Definition: “The idea that the human works together with God in certain aspects of salvation—especially in regeneration, which is said to be a cooperative effort of divine aid and human faith.”¹⁶
- 2. From the Greek syn (with) + ergon (work) = working together

¹² Kelly M. Kapic and Wesley Vander Lugt, *Pocket Dictionary of the Reformed Tradition*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 75–76.

¹³ John D. Barry et al., eds., “Pelagianism,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹⁴ John M’Clintock and James Strong, “Monergism,” in *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1894), 481.

¹⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 817.

¹⁶ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 938.

3. Armenians, Wesleyans, Roman Catholics, and the Eastern Orthodox hold this view. Resources that promote this view are but aren't limited to:
 - a. Jacobus Arminius, *Works of James Arminius*, esp. "Declaration of Sentiments" (on conditional election and prevenient grace)
 - b. John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Sermon 85 ("On Working Out Our Own Salvation")
 - c. Thomas Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993)
4. This view includes "any Soteriology that employs an independent human free will to 'work together' with God's activity of grace in regeneration."¹⁷
5. The Synergistic order of salvation typically is as follows:
 - a. Prevenient grace (God graciously enables sinners to respond)
 - b. Calling (through the gospel)
 - c. Faith and repentance (human response, empowered by grace)
 - d. Regeneration (God imparts spiritual life)
 - e. Justification (declared righteous by faith)
 - f. Adoption (welcomed into God's family)
 - g. Sanctification (growth in holiness; possible loss if one falls away)
 - h. Glorification (final redemption in eternity)

D. What should this cause us to do?

1. Search the Scripture. These positions have been debated and discussed for millennia, each attempting to rightly divide the Word of truth. We should study ourselves so that we aren't found as ashamed workmen.
2. Do your homework. Throughout this course, we will explore the doctrine of salvation. Don't just come to class; engage your own mind in personal study.

Conclusion:

Soteriology reveals that salvation is far greater than our personal experience—it is God's eternal plan to reveal the glory of His grace through Christ. By studying it, we see both the depth of our need and the riches of God's provision in election, redemption, and our new life. These truths should not only inform our minds but also stir our hearts to worship, strengthen our assurance, and move us to share the gospel. In the end, the doctrine of salvation directs all praise back to the God who saves for His name's sake.

¹⁷ Kelly M. Kapic and Wesley Vander Lugt, *Pocket Dictionary of the Reformed Tradition*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 115.