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I N T R O D U C T I O N

B Y G E N E R A L E D I T O R

Why another series of works on evangelical systematic theology? This is an especially appropriate question in light of the fact that evangelicals are fully committed to an inspired and inerrant Bible as their final authority for faith and practice. But since neither God nor the Bible change, why is there a need to redo evangelical systematic theology?

Systematic theology is not divine revelation. Theologizing of any sort is a human conceptual enterprise. Thinking that it is equal to biblical revelation misunderstands the nature of both Scripture and theology! Insofar as our theology contains propositions that accurately reflect Scripture or match the world and are consistent with the Bible (in cases where the propositions do not come per se from Scripture), our theology is biblically based and correct. But even if all the propositions of a systematic theology are true, that theology would still not be equivalent to biblical revelation! It is still a human conceptualization of God and his relation to the world.

Although this may disturb some who see theology as nothing more than doing careful exegesis over a series of passages, and others who see it as nothing more than biblical theology, those methods of doing theology do not somehow produce a theology that is equivalent to biblical revelation either. Exegesis is a human conceptual enterprise, and so is biblical theology. All the theological disciplines involve human intellectual participation. But human intellect is finite, and hence there is always room for revision of systematic theology as knowledge increases. Though God and his word do not change, human understanding of his revelation can grow, and our theologies should be reworked to reflect those advances in understanding.

Another reason for evangelicals to rework their theology is the nature of systematic theology as opposed to other theological disciplines. For

example, whereas the task of biblical theology is more to describe biblical teaching on whatever topics Scripture addresses, systematics should make a special point to relate its conclusions to the issues of one's day. This does not mean that the systematician ignores the topics biblical writers address. Nor does it mean that theologians should warp Scripture to address issues it never intended to address. Rather, it suggests that in addition to expounding what biblical writers teach, the theologian should attempt to take those biblical teachings (along with the biblical mindset) and apply them to issues that are especially confronting the church in the theologian's own day. For example, 150 years ago, an evangelical theologian doing work on the doctrine of man would likely have discussed issues such as the creation of man and the constituent parts of man's being. Such a theology might even have included a discussion about human institutions such as marriage, noting in general the respective roles of husbands and wives in marriage. However, it is dubious that there would have been any lengthy discussion with various viewpoints about the respective roles of men and women in marriage, in society, and in the church. But at our point in history and in light of the feminist movement and the issues it has raised even among many conservative Christians, it would be foolish to write a theology of man (or, should we say, a "theology of humanity") without a thorough discussion of the issue of the roles of men and women in society, the home, and the church.

Because systematic theology attempts to address itself not only to the timeless issues presented in Scripture but also to the current issues of one's day and culture, each theology will to some extent need to be redone in each generation. Biblical truth does not change from generation to generation, but the issues that confront the church do. A theology that was adequate for a different era and different culture may simply not speak to key issues in a given culture at a given time. Hence, in this series we are reworking evangelical systematic theology, though we do so with the understanding that in future generations there will be room for a revision of theology again.

How, then, do the contributors to this series understand the nature of systematic theology? Systematic theology as done from an evangelical Christian perspective involves study of the person, works, and relationships of God. As evangelicals committed to the full inspiration, inerrancy, and final authority of Scripture, we demand that whatever appears in a systematic theology correspond to the way things are and must not contradict any claim taught in Scripture. Holy Writ is the touchstone of our theology, but we do not limit the source material for systematics to Scripture alone. Hence, whatever information from history, science, philosophy, and the like is relevant to our understanding of God and his rela-

tion to our world is fair game for systematics. Depending on the specific interests and expertise of the contributors to this series, their respective volumes will reflect interaction with one or more of these disciplines.

What is the rationale for appealing to other sources than Scripture and other disciplines than the biblical ones? Since God created the universe, there is revelation of God not only in Scripture but in the created order as well. There are many disciplines that study our world, just as does theology. But since the world studied by the non-theological disciplines is the world created by God, any data and conclusions in the so-called secular disciplines that accurately reflect the real world are also relevant to our understanding of the God who made that world. Hence, in a general sense, since all of creation is God's work, nothing is outside the realm of theology. The so-called secular disciplines need to be thought of in a theological context, because they are reflecting on the universe God created, just as is the theologian. And, of course, there are many claims in the non-theological disciplines that are generally accepted as true (although this does not mean that every claim in non-theological disciplines is true, or that we are in a position with respect to every proposition to know whether it is true or false). Since this is so, and since all disciplines are in one way or another reflecting on our universe, a universe made by God, any true statement in any discipline should in some way be informative for our understanding of God and his relation to our world. Hence, we have felt it appropriate to incorporate data from outside the Bible in our theological formulations.

As to the specific design of this series, our intention is to address all areas of evangelical theology with a special emphasis on key issues in each area. While other series may be more like a history of doctrine, this series purposes to incorporate insights from Scripture, historical theology, philosophy, etc. in order to produce an up-to-date work in systematic theology. Though all contributors to the series are thoroughly evangelical in their theology, embracing the historical orthodox doctrines of the church, the series as a whole is not meant to be slanted in the direction of one form of evangelical theology. Nonetheless, most of the writers come from a Reformed perspective. Alternate evangelical and non-evangelical options, however, are discussed.

As to style and intended audience, this series is meant to rest on the very best of scholarship while at the same time being understandable to the beginner in theology as well as the academic theologian. With that in mind, contributors are writing in a clear style, taking care to define whatever technical terms they use.

Finally, we believe that systematic theology is not just for the understanding. It must apply to life, and it must be lived. As Paul wrote to Timothy, God

has given divine revelation for many purposes, including ones that necessitate doing theology, but the ultimate reason for giving revelation and for theologians doing theology is that the people of God may be fitted for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In light of the need for theology to connect to life, each of the contributors not only formulates doctrines but also explains how those doctrines practically apply to everyday living.

It is our sincerest hope that the work we have done in this series will first glorify and please God, and, secondly, instruct and edify the people of God. May God be pleased to use this series to those ends, and may he richly bless you as you read the fruits of our labors.

John S. Feinberg
General Editor

As many observers of the contemporary religious scene have noted, America has had a powerful Christian heritage. For more than a century this country has been the most spiritually vital and productive nation on earth. Multitudes around the world have looked to America as a beacon of spiritual light, truth, and hope. But in recent years the power and vitality of these spiritual convictions have waned. The torch of truth and hope has flickered and in the closing years of the millennium threatens to be extinguished. Confidence in the Bible and its teachings is ebbing to an all-time low. Time-honored theological convictions have been relegated to the trash-heap of irrelevance. The virtual eclipse of the notion of sin has led to confusion regarding the cross and a clouding of the hope of salvation. The biblical verities of atonement through Christ's work on Calvary and salvation from sin and satanic powers has been supplanted by substitute agendas of psychological wholeness, social adjustment, and simply being a good and loving person. George Barna predicts that America's faith in the new millennium will become syncretistic (not unlike that of OT Israel's religion), embracing themes of love and acceptance from Christianity, self-divinity from Eastern religions, and relationships in community from Mormonism (George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle* [Regal, 1990], p. 141).

When invited by Crossway Books and Dr. John S. Feinberg, to participate in this theology series, I sensed the need for a clear and comprehensive treatment of the doctrines of the cross and salvation from sin. Unless a person appropriates Christ's saving work holistically in the life, one winds up in a cul-de-sac of disappointment and despair. This study is presented with the hope and prayer that it will make plain and relevant God's glorious plan of salvation, his provision for the human dilemma through Christ's work,

and the application of saving grace to the unconverted. Why write another book on the cross and the plan of salvation? Many fine treatises have been written on these themes through the years. And surely the Gospel and the way of salvation through Christ never change. But the human situation is constantly in flux, and new and challenging issues come to the fore that demand biblically faithful answers. When asked why he had labored to write several lengthy tomes, the German theologian and preacher Helmut Thielicke replied that the Gospel needs to be redirected in fresh and compelling ways to each new generation, for modern people are constantly changing their addresses. It is hoped that this book will appeal to college and seminary students seeking clarification of their theological views, to pastors, to motivated Christian laypeople, and to honest seekers of the truth who do not yet embrace the faith.

Apart from the introduction (chap. 1) and the conclusion (chap. 12), the ten chapters that constitute the heart of the book follow a common format. In each of these chapters we *first* seek to define the topic or problem and identify the most important issues needing to be addressed. *Second*, believing that the Spirit of God has been with the church in its pilgrimage through the centuries, we examine the most important ways in which this problem has been understood and lived out historically within the broad framework of Christendom. *Third*, we interpret the data of biblical revelation and construct a statement of the doctrine that is factually accurate and rationally coherent. And *fourth*, we propose meaningful ways in which the reader can apply the realities proposed in practical life and conduct. The conviction here is that a coherent, biblical theology must be lived out in a distinctively Christian lifestyle. It is our hope that this volume will be historically perceptive, biblically faithful, culturally relevant, and experientially viable. Our intention is that it will inform minds, inflame hearts, and motivate hands to practical Christian living.

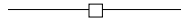
Appreciation is expressed to the faculty, administration, and board of trustees of Denver Seminary for granting a sabbatical leave that made possible the completion of this work. I am indebted to my colleague in theology, Senior Professor Gordon Lewis, whose interaction over the years has sharpened my perspective on many of these issues. Denver Seminary students, in the daily give and take of theology courses, likewise have stimulated understanding and application of the topics presented in this work. I thank my former teaching assistant, Darius Panahpour, for checking Scripture references and proofing the manuscript. Finally, I am greatly indebted to my wife, Elsie, for her encouragement and sacrifice in the production of this volume. May this and other volumes in the series bring glory to God and contribute to the advancement of his kingdom on earth.

I

T H E P L A N
O F S A L V A T I O N

“WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?”

A C T S I 6 : 3 0

I N T R O D U C T I O N T O
T H E D O C T R I N E O F S A L V A T I O NI. THE BIBLE
A BOOK ABOUT SALVATION

The issue of one's future security, if not eternal destiny, is uppermost in the hearts and minds of most right-thinking people. The heart cry of unsaved people who are sensitive to their deepest spiritual needs can only be that posed to Paul and Silas by the Philippian jailor: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). It is obvious even to the casual reader that the central message of the Bible concerns the spiritual recovery or salvation of lost men and women. From the *Protoevangelium* of Gen 3:15 to Rev 22:21, Scripture relates the grand story of how God has acted in grace to save his wayward image-bearers.

The OT deals with salvation in a promissory and provisional way. The Hebrew words for salvation shed valuable light on the meaning of this important theological concept. The root *ys'* means to "be broad" or "spacious," suggesting freedom from powers that restrict holistic personal development. The Hebrew verb *yasa'* and its derivatives appear 353 times in the OT. In the Niphal it bears the meaning "be saved" or "be delivered," whereas in the Hiphil it means to "deliver," "give victory," or "save." The nouns *yesu'ah* (sixty-four times), *yasa'* (thirty-one times), and *tesu'ah* (nineteen times) signify "help," "deliverance," "salvation." The preceding verb and nouns are most frequently used in the general sense of deliverance from various forms of distress, danger, or bondage. Thus

the word group describes deliverance from Egypt via the Exodus (Exod 14:13, 30; 15:2; Deut 33:29), victory over Israel's enemies (Num 10:9; Judg 6:14-16; Neh 9:27; Ps 44:7), release from exile (Ps 106:47; Isa 46:13; Ezek 34:22), and preservation in times of national peril (Jer 14:8). But given the close connection in the OT between the material and the spiritual, the word group occasionally denotes deliverance from sin and its consequences (cf. Jer 17:14; Ezek 37:23), especially in the Psalms (51:12, 14) and Isaiah (30:15; 52:7; 59:1; 61:10). The literature makes clear that the Lord God, not any human warrior or king, is the only Savior. "I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior" (Isa 43:11; cf. 43:3; 45:15, 21; Hos 13:4). In Isaiah's prophecy "God" and "savior" are synonymous (Isa 45:21; cf. 25:9). All strictly human attempts to confer salvation are futile (Ps 60:11; 146:3). Marshall correctly concludes that in the OT the word salvation is "used in a very broad sense of the sum total of the effects of God's goodness on his people (Ps 53:6)."¹

In the NT the verb *sozo* (more than 100 times) means to "rescue," "deliver," "save;" the noun *soteria* (forty-nine times) denotes "salvation;" and the personal noun *soter* (twenty-four times) signifies "redeemer," "deliverer," "savior." The word group generally connotes rescue or deliverance from danger, disease, enemies, or bondage (Matt 8:25; 14:30; Mark 5:34; Luke 1:71; Heb 11:7; Jas 5:15). But in the NT the personal, spiritual, and ethical dimension of salvation, implicit in the OT, comes to full light. Thus the Greek word group commonly bears the theological meaning of deliverance from sin, death, and the Devil and the gift of eternal life (Luke 1:69, 77; 18:26; Acts 4:12; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Thess 5:9; Heb 9:28). In the NT God is the Savior (Luke 1:47; 1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; Tit 1:3; 2:10; 3:4), in that the divine Father planned the gift of salvation and sent his only Son into the world on a saving mission. But specifically Jesus is the Savior (Luke 2:11; Acts 13:23; Eph 5:23; Tit 1:4; 2 Pet 1:1, 11; 3:2, 18), because the purpose of his life and death was to recover sinners from their lost condition (Matt 1:21; John 3:17; 12:47). The salvation Jesus brought is primarily personal and spiritual. It is instructive that the Greek name for Jesus, *Iesous*, is a transliteration of the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means, "Yahweh is salvation." Christians (Acts 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16), at a minimum, are those who believe in and commit themselves to Jesus as Savior.

The centrality of salvation in the NT is further evidenced by the fact that the burden of the disciples' message, both orally and in writing, was salvation from sin. Thus *Peter*, used of God to launch the Christian movement, boldly proclaimed salvation through the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12;

5:31; 1 Pet 1:3-5). God in eternity past chose his people for salvation (1 Pet 1:1; 2:9), and in time he gave them new life (1 Pet 1:3, 23; 2 Pet 1:4) through their response of faith (1 Pet 1:9, 21). Peter enjoined believers to purify themselves (1 Pet 1:15-16; 2:1, 11; 2 Pet 3:11) through God’s enablement (2 Pet 1:3) and so to persevere in God’s grace (1 Pet 5:12). *John* taught that the Father sent his only Son to bring the world salvation (John 3:17; 1 John 2:2). Thus Jesus is “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14). According to John, the Father gave to the Son the “sheep” he purposed to save (John 6:37, 39). For their part the “sheep” believe on the Son and obey him (John 10:27, 42). They receive forgiveness and cleansing of sins (1 John 1:7, 9; 2:12) and the gift of eternal life (John 3:16-17, 36; 1 John 2:25; 5:11, 13). The Father and the Son vouchsafe to preserve the “sheep” safe to the end (John 6:39; 10:29). *Paul* declared that in grace (Rom 5:15; 1 Cor 1:4; 15:10; 2 Cor 9:14) God sent his Son into the world to bestow on sinful Jews and Gentiles (Acts 13:26, 46; 28:28) the gift of salvation, viewed as forgiveness of sins (Eph 4:32; Col 2:13), right standing with God (Rom 1:17; 3:21-22; 5:17; Phil 3:9), reconciliation with the Father (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18-19), and new birth (2 Cor 5:17; Tit 3:5). *Luke* viewed the universal salvation (Luke 1:69, 71, 77; 3:6; 19:9) as redemption from oppression and sin (1:68, 74), particularly the recovery of that which was lost (15:3-32; 19:10). Salvation is predicated upon a spirit of true repentance (13:3, 5). *The writer to the Hebrews* used the word “salvation” seven times, more than in any other NT document. The letter envisages Jesus’ saving work as the perfect fulfillment of the OT sacrificial system (Heb 2:3; 5:8-9; 9:28). Via the single self-offering of his body, Christ destroyed Satan (2:14), put away sin (9:26, 28; 10:18), freed those who were in spiritual bondage (2:15), and so brought “many sons to glory” (2:10). The saints are urged to persevere in faith that they may receive all that God has promised (6:12; 10:36). *Jude* upheld the true salvation that came through Jesus Christ against the distorted views of proto-Gnostic false teachers (Jude 4) who will perish in their unbelief (v. 7). To gain salvation Jude stressed the need for correct beliefs (v. 3), prayer (v. 20), and perseverance (v. 21a). Yet he assured believers that God is fully able to preserve them safely to the end (vv. 24-25).

In sum, the word salvation in its theological sense denotes, negatively, deliverance from sin, death, and divine wrath and, positively, the bestowal of far-ranging spiritual blessings both temporal and eternal. God freely conveys these benefits on the basis of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Mediator. Soteriology (from the Greek words *soter* and *logos*) is the theological term denoting the doctrine of salvation, the

aspects of which will be discussed in logical order in the subsequent chapters of this volume.

II. HUMANKIND'S NEED FOR SALVATION

Because of the problem of human sin, the salvation described above is absolutely necessary if one would experience new life in fellowship with God. Scripture is clear in asserting that every last person in the world succumbs to sin (Ps 53:1, 3; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:10, 23; 5:12) and consequently experiences moral corruption, estrangement from God, forfeiture of eternal life, and everlasting punishment.

Consider, first, what Scripture teaches concerning the *present condition* of the lost. The Lord Jesus spoke candidly about the present spiritual condition of unconverted men and women. In conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus implied that those who have not been born again are perishing (*apollymi*, John 3:16). Furthermore, in his encounter with Zacchaeus Jesus said, “the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost” (*to apololos*, Luke 19:10). The figurative notions of perishing and lostness connote the forfeiture of everything good and utter spiritual ruin. The parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-32) graphically highlights the spiritual bankruptcy and moral degradation of unconverted rebels against the loving Father. In addition, Jesus described the present condition of the unconverted in the language of judgment or condemnation. The Lord said, “whoever does not believe stands condemned already [*ede kekritai*] because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18). The true believer in Jesus experiences no judgment or condemnation; but the unbeliever has been judged already (perfect tense), and thus stands under the condemnation of the holy God.

The apostle Paul wrote extensively about the present condition of the lost. Paul explained (1) that the unsaved are *spiritually depraved*. To the Ephesian Christians he wrote that formerly “you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Eph 2:1-2). The unsaved, Paul continued, live “in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (4:17-19). (2)

They are *alienated from the life of God*. Paul added, “remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God [*atheoi*] in the world” (2:12; cf. Col 1:21). Cut off from the fellowship and privileges of God’s people, the Ephesians prior to their conversion had no life in God, no hope in the present, and no hope beyond the grave. (3) The unconverted are *guilty and condemned*. Unable to keep the law in its entirety, the unsaved dwell under the curse of the law (Gal 3:10). So Paul wrote that “The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation” (*katakrima*, Rom 5:16), and “the result of one trespass was condemnation [*katakrima*] for all men” (v. 18). And so “we were by nature objects of wrath” (Eph 2:3b). And (4) the unsaved are hopelessly *enslaved by sin, death, and the Devil*. Paul described the unconverted as “controlled by the sinful nature” (Rom 7:5), taken captive and dominated by Satan (2 Tim 2:26; 1 John 5:19), and so as a practical manner of living, “slaves to sin” (Rom 6:16-17, 20). The writer of Hebrews recognized that the unregenerate live in bondage to the fear of death (Heb 2:15).

From careful observation of human behavior the secular Roman orator and politician Cicero boldly asserted that “Man is a disaster!” The French apologist Pascal recognized the pathetic paradox that is man, at one and the same time image of God yet grossly corrupted by sin. “What sort of freak then is man! How novel, how monstrous, how chaotic, how paradoxical, how prodigious! Judge of all things, feeble earthworm, repository of truth, sink of doubt and error, glory and refuse of the universe!”² In the same vein the Puritan Joseph Alleine wrote, “O miserable man, what a deformed monster has sin made you! God made you ‘little lower than the angels;’ sin has made you little better than the devils.”³

We can say that the merely once-born are “sub-human,” in the sense that they have allowed sin to deform and deface their authentic personhood as image of God. While imprisoned by the Germans, Dietrich Bonhoeffer acutely recognized the descent into barbarism brought about by sin. The Lutheran theologian and martyr wrote, “Only the man who is taken up in Christ is the real man.”⁴ We must acknowledge the truth that the unsaved are radically fallen and stand under the wrath and condemnation of God Almighty. This situation is true of primitive pagans who practice the devilish rites of heathen religion. (As an aside, the following chapter will deal with the issue of God’s kindness and mercy directed to pagan people.) But just condemnation is also true of so-called enlightened and sophisticated western people in their unconverted state.

Consider also Scripture’s depiction of the *future condition* of the lost. Certain OT poetic and wisdom texts speak about the wicked perishing or

being destroyed (Ps 1:6; 37:20; 49:10; 73:27; Prov 11:10; 28:28). The Kal form of the verb *'abad* in the preceding verses sometimes denotes physical death, but on other occasions it signifies utter spiritual loss or ruin—albeit never extinction of being. The prophet Daniel under inspiration of the Spirit wrote that “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan 12:2).

Moreover, the altogether lovely and compassionate Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees who rejected him, “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24; cf. 5:28-29). It is significant that Jesus spoke more about the sorrows of hell than of the joys of heaven. The Lord taught that the unrepentant or unsaved would be consigned to *gehenna*, the place of eschatological punishment (Matt 10:28; 23:33; Luke 12:5). He affirmed that hell is a place of conscious torment (Matt 5:22; 18:9; Mark 9:43) and of everlasting duration (Matt 25:41, 46; Mark 9:48). Jesus’ saying in Matt 25:46 (cf. 18:8) clearly confirms that “The damned shall live as long in hell as God Himself shall live in heaven.”⁵ The compassionate Lord candidly described hell as a place of “darkness” (Matt 8:12; 22:13), a fiery furnace (Matt 13:42, 50; cf. 5:22; 13:30; 18:8-9; 25:41; Mark 9:43, 48), and a place where the worm never dies (Mark 9:48).

Paul, in strong and harsh language, wrote that “the Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people” (2 Thess 1:7b-10a). The apostle firmly believed that those who refuse God’s offer of grace will be consigned to perdition, forever beyond the reach of God’s love and care.

The apostle John, in a foreboding vision of the future, saw the dead in resurrected bodies standing before the Great White Throne. The books containing the record of human deeds were opened, and each person was judged according to what was written therein. John’s concluding words are hauntingly sober: “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). John explained that “The lake of fire is the second death” (v. 14)—i.e., the state of agonizing exclusion from the presence of God (Matt 22:13). Jesus told us that the second death is an event more fearful than the death of the body (Matt 10:28). John then added that “the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

This is the second death” (Rev 21:8). This punishment in hell, or the lake of fire, according to John, will be everlasting (Rev 14:11).

Several Greek words metaphorically connote ultimate spiritual ruin, the loss of everything good, and perdition in hell. One word group consists of the verb *apollymi* (active, to “destroy,” “ruin”; passive, “irretrievably perish,” “be lost in hell”) and the noun *apoleia* (“loss,” “ruin”). Jesus said, “wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction” (Matt 7:13). Both *apollymi* (John 3:16; 10:28; 17:12a; Rom 2:12; 1 Cor 15:17-18; 2 Thess 2:10) and *apoleia* (John 17:12b; Rom 9:22; Phil 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 6:9; Heb 10:39; 2 Pet 2:1; 3:7) figuratively describe absolute spiritual ruin—namely, eternal perdition in hell, which is the polar opposite of salvation and eternal life. The NT writers also employed the verbs *ptheiro* (to “defile,” “corrupt,” “spoil,” “ruin”) in 1 Cor 3:17 and Jude 10, and *diaptheiro* (to “corrupt,” “destroy”) in Rev 11:18 figuratively of ultimate spiritual ruin in hell. They also described the future ruin of the unsaved by the nouns *pthora* (“decay,” “corruption,” “ruin”) in Gal 6:8, Col 2:22, and 2 Pet 2:12 and *olethros* (“ruin,” “destruction”) in 1 Thess 5:3; 2 Thess 1:9; and 1 Tim 6:9.

The Puritan Thomas Watson struggled to describe in human words the future state of the lost in hell.

Thus it is in Hell; they would die, but they cannot. The wicked shall be always dying but never dead; the smoke of the furnace ascends for ever and ever. Oh! who can endure thus to be ever upon the rack? This word “ever” breaks the heart. Wicked men now think the Sabbaths long, and think a prayer long; but oh! how long will it be to lie in hell for ever and ever?⁶

Faithful to revealed truth, the Scottish professor James Denney wrote, “If there is any truth in Scripture at all, this is true—that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to the Gospel, and to love and obey Jesus Christ incur at the Last Advent an infinite and irreparable loss. They pass into a night on which no morning dawns.”⁷ Such is the horrendous future of sinners who do not experience in life God’s gracious salvation.

III. VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF SALVATION

The nature of salvation has been variously interpreted by the different traditions within Christendom. Consider first the traditional *Roman Catholic* understanding of salvation. Rome argues that the visible church, which

was founded on Peter (Matt 16:18-19) and transmitted to his successors, the bishops, mediates salvation to its adherents. Catholicism insists that the supernatural benefits of Christ's sacrifice are conveyed physically through the church's sacraments. Assuming the recipient imposes no obstacle to their working, the sacraments mediate saving grace simply because performed in an approved way (*ex opere operato*). The sacrament of baptism is said to remit original sin, impart sanctifying grace, and unite the soul to Christ. The baptized person is justified not legally by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, but as he or she cooperates with the sacramentally infused grace and performs meritorious works. Thus justification, in Catholic thought, merges into what Protestants understand as sanctification. Viewed as personal transformation, salvation is progressively realized throughout the lifetime of the baptized. Apart from a private revelation, assurance of final salvation is not possible, since the perpetration of a single mortal sin would separate the soul from Christ and incur the judgment of final damnation. Catholicism traditionally holds that at the end of one's life residual sin is burned away by the purifying fire of purgatory. On balance Roman Catholic theology is synergistic, stressing the synthesis of divine and human actions; salvation is by grace *and* by works. The Second Vatican Council redefined salvation existentially and broadened its scope to include all non-Christian religionists and even atheists. Contemporary Catholicism thus is quite universalistic in its outlook.

Theological liberalism assumes a number of forms, but a typical liberal understanding of salvation in the American context could be represented as follows. Stimulated by the rationalism of the Enlightenment, liberalism denies supernaturalism, miracles, biblical authority, and other classical doctrines of the faith. The tradition commonly rejects the fall of the race, human depravity, divine wrath, Christ's substitutionary atonement, and the need for definitive, individual conversion. Positing an optimistic, evolutionary view of persons and history, liberals view salvation as the process of perfecting an infantile, but inherently noble, race rather than redeeming a fallen, and inherently sinful, one. On the individual level, salvation amounts to the moral transformation of persons by right conduct and good works stimulated by the teachings and example of Jesus. In this respect theological liberalism simply stated is "a religion of ethical culture."⁸ The so-called "social gospel" liberals of the first half of the twentieth century envisaged salvation as a collective reality. They defined salvation as the transformation of human society by education, social change, and political action motivated by the ideals and ethics of Jesus of Nazareth.

Although *Christian existentialism* also embraces a range of opinion, it

is united by several common themes. Its focus is anthropocentric rather than theocentric, and it centers on the individual rather than on the group or community. It believes that human existence is estranged from reality by preoccupation with the world of objects, requiring no decision or risk (the ‘I-it’ relation), rather than the fulfilling world of personal relationships (the ‘I-Thou’ relation). According to Christian existentialism, persons are estranged from their authentic mode of being and hence suffer alienation, anxiety, and despair. Assent to rational truths, formal creeds, or theological systems does not save; rather it constitutes a cheap faith, even the faith of demons. The faith that saves, Christian existentialists assert, is the act of believing with deep inner passion and radical engagement; it is the faith that gives itself to a life of costly discipleship. Faith commits to the ultimate paradox that Jesus Christ bridged the chasm between the infinite God and sinners. It makes a courageous commitment, in defiance of all reason, to the One who demands that a choice be made between living according to God’s demands or one’s own pleasure. The result of this costly decision is Christ’s presence in the heart and the personal realization of authentic existence—namely, the elimination of anxiety (*Angst*), the forgiveness of sins, the realization of one’s full potential, and the transformation of life.

Liberation theology, viewing itself as a faith contextualized for developing societies, is a theology of praxis that relies heavily on the Marxist analysis of culture. The movement advocates a retreat from personal, inward, and spiritual realities to collective, outward, and structural concerns. It generally assumes that all persons are in Christ, but that they have become radically dehumanized by social, economic, and political oppression, which in turn have spawned poverty, illiteracy, violence, and untold human suffering. Liberationists view salvation collectively as the overthrow of unjust and corrupting social structures by revolution and violence, if necessary. They extol the Exodus from Egypt as the primary biblical paradigm of God’s liberating action from structural oppression. Liberationists allege that the release of the oppressed Israelites by severe plagues made them whole again and freed them to serve God and others. The agenda of liberation theology thus is congruent with the cry of the black activist Angela Davis, who in the 1960s exclaimed, when handcuffed by the police: “Break these chains and I will be free!” Liberation theology usually makes little place for Christ’s atoning work on the cross, faith as belief in the truth and trust in the Savior, and the lostness of those who do not trust Christ. Indeed, it commonly subscribes to the doctrine of universalism, which means that God is saving all people everywhere. As expressed by the Indian theologian M.M. Thomas, liberationists

uphold a salvation “not in any pietistic or individualistic isolation, but related to and expressed within the material, social and cultural revolution of our time.”⁹

Against Bultmann and the existentialists, *Barthian neoorthodoxy* regards salvation as an objective event and only secondarily as a subjective process. Barth held that Christ objectively wrought salvation for all people by his victory on the cross (the “classic” theory of the Atonement). He argued that Christ at his coming united to himself *humanum*—the entire human race. Thus in Christ’s death on the cross the world’s sin was judged and in his resurrection the race was vindicated. The justification and sanctification (or conversion) of every person through Christ’s death and victorious resurrection represent the outworking of the *covenant* God instituted in eternity past to bring humankind into fellowship with himself. Salvation thus is something God decisively accomplished at Calvary; people have little to contribute to its achievement. Indeed, Barth envisaged faith, repentance, and obedience as *manifestations* of a finished salvation rather than as the means by which that salvation is personally realized.¹⁰ Barth minimized the human responses of faith, repentance, and obedience to avoid introducing into the scheme of salvation by grace what he perceived to be a dangerous works doctrine. Herein Barth’s strong reaction against theological liberalism is evident; not man but *God* is the chief actor in the drama of salvation. Given the triumph of grace in the Cross, Barth’s formulation of salvation brings us to the vestibule of universalism. All persons are in Christ, Barth held, even though Christ is not in all persons. Formally the unrepentant are justified and sanctified, but existentially they need to awake from their spiritual slumber and experience the salvation Christ accomplished as their Representative.

Evangelical *Arminians* claim that in love God sent Christ into the world for the purpose of saving humankind from the ruin of sin (universal Atonement) and that God desires the salvation of all (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9). They insist that universal, prevenient grace flowing from Christ’s cross (“preparing grace”) transforms sinners in the first moment of moral light, thereby nullifying the debilitating effects of depravity, restoring moral free agency, and convicting of sin. Thus blessed by prevenient grace and when confronted with the general call to salvation, the unsaved cooperate with God, repent of sins, and trust Christ as Savior. Arminians emphasize that the grace and calling of God are *resistible*, hence sinners may choose to reject Christ and continue in their sins. Arminians understand the doctrine of *election* conditionally as God’s decision to save those he foresaw would respond to grace and accept Christ. Corporately, the class of people who believe the Gospel and persevere to the end are designated “the elect.”

Many Arminians view *regeneration* synergistically; the new birth occurs as a result of human willing and divine working. Furthermore, some affirm that God wills that *sanctification* be perfected in this life by a second work of grace that is said to eradicate the sinful nature and its desires, fill the heart with perfect love for God, and enable Christians to live without willful sin. This decisive post-conversion experience is designated “entire sanctification,” “sinless perfection,” and “full salvation.” In addition, many Arminians deny the doctrine of the *perseverance of the saints*. They insist that by deliberate sin Christians can renounce their prior faith commitment and thereby fall from the state of grace, forfeit eternal salvation, and be doomed to perdition. The Arminian understanding of salvation thus is synergistic (a “working together”); divine grace and the liberated human will cooperate to bring about salvation. From inception to consummation the unsaved via free will make significant contributions to the outworking of their salvation.

Evangelicals in the *Reformed* tradition believe Scripture to teach that by willful spiritual defection the highest of God’s creatures are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). As noted above, Scripture portrays the unconverted as possessing minds darkened to spiritual truth, wills arrayed in enmity against God, affections disordered by sundry lusts, consciences defiled by faithless responses, and hands devoted to every evil work. Holistically depraved sinners have neither the inclination nor the ability to seek God and spiritual life. Hence the initiative in salvation must reside with the sovereign God. God’s grace plans, precedes, undergirds, and executes the process of salvation from beginning to end. Reformed Evangelicals thus extol the confession of Jonah after experiencing God’s wisdom and goodness: “Salvation comes from the Lord” (Jon 2:9).

The reformational tradition asserts that in eternity past God sovereignly purposed to bestow saving grace upon whom he would, independent of foreseen works. The rest of humanity he left in their self-chosen sin to suffer the just penalty thereof. Those whom God in eternity past graciously chose by the Spirit in time he effectually draws to Christ. One strand of Reformed thinking holds that, subjectively, the Spirit enables the chosen and called to believe the truth in Christ, turn from all known sins, and trust Jesus as Savior and Lord of their lives. God creates in the converted a new spiritual nature—in the sense not of another ontological constitution but as a new set of godly inclinations, desires, and habits. Objectively, the Spirit incorporates regenerated believers into Christ in a vital, spiritual, and indissoluble union, attested by the common “in Christ” motif. The Father then forgives their sins, accepts them as righteous in his sight, and bestows the gift of eternal life. Furthermore, in the lifelong work of sanc-

tification the Spirit progressively mortifies believers' old nature and fortifies the new nature such that they become like Jesus in thought, word, and deed. Thus God not only declares believing sinners righteous; he effectively *makes* them so by the Spirit. We are saved not merely to gain heaven but also to live in holiness, truth, and love. Moreover, those whom God has regenerated, united to Christ, and justified he preserves by the Spirit to the end. Twice-born people at times disobey God and grieve his Spirit; but the Lord's sure grip prevents them from falling away finally and completely. Lastly, God will bring salvation to completion at the return of Christ when pilgrim saints behold the Savior's face and are fully transformed into his likeness. Biblical salvation thus has past, present, and future dimensions. The born-again person can say with confidence, "I have been saved, I am being saved, and at Christ's return I finally will be saved."

IV. THE 'ORDER OF SALVATION'

Scripture reveals that God applies Christ's objective work on the cross progressively by the Spirit through a series of movements. This has led theologians to suggest that God purposefully established a definable order of salvation. The Lutheran theologians Franz Buddeus and Jacob Carpov in the first half of the eighteenth century were the first to coin the phrase "*ordo salutis*" to denote such a sequence. Formulations of the *ordo* attempt to express the way by which God through Christ imparts salvation to sinners from inception to consummation or from eternity past to eternity future. Such an ordering scheme may be logical, chronological, or both. It may involve what God purposes and what he actually accomplishes. It may equally include what God does and what humans do. It may contain aspects that are declarative and instantaneous as well as those that are experiential and progressive. According to John Murray, "God is not the author of confusion and therefore he is the author of order. There are good and conclusive reasons for thinking that the various actions of the application of redemption . . . take place in a certain order, and that that order has been established by divine appointment, wisdom, and grace."¹¹ We proceed to summarize the ways in which leading Christian traditions have represented the order of salvation. Thereafter we will examine relevant NT passages to make a decision concerning the legitimacy of such an ordering schema and to propose our own arrangement of the elements of salvation.

The order of salvation in *Roman Catholic theology* is usually expressed

in terms of the grace mediated by the church's sacraments. Thus (1) the sacrament of *baptism* (Tit 3:5) imparts supernatural life by regenerating the soul and uniting it with Christ. Water baptism, in addition, is said to remove the guilt and penalty of original sin. Through the sacrament of baptism “Man is made white as a sheet, brighter than snow.”¹²

(2) The sacrament of *confirmation* (Acts 8:15-17) strengthens the baptized through a Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. By this endowment the confirmed are enabled to witness to Christ and to stand firm in the midst of life's struggles.

(3) The sacrament of the *Eucharist* (Matt 26:26-28) imparts spiritual nourishment as the worshiper feeds on the body and blood of Christ in the transubstantiated wafer. “This sacrament is nourishment. It is for the divine life of the soul what food and drink are for the life of the body. This life, the state of grace, is maintained by it, preserved from ruin, strengthened and augmented.”¹³

(4) The sacrament of *penance*, or the “second pardon,” remits the guilt and punishment of post-baptismal, mortal sins (apostasy, murder, adultery). The sacrament requires of the penitent contrition for sins, confession, and works of satisfaction (almsgiving, fasting, etc.).

Finally (5) the sacrament of *extreme unction* or *last anointing* (Jas 5:14-16) equips the soul for the final conflict with death and prepares the recipient for the beatific vision of God. This sacrament “gives the grace of a good death, consolation in that depression which comes to so many because of the memory of their sins, and pardon for all sins not yet forgiven in confession.”¹⁴

The order of salvation in *Lutheran theology* seeks to define and distinguish the Spirit's multiple acts of grace without creating an artificial separation one from the other. Elements of the order more or less overlap one another. The following order generally prevails.

(1) *Calling* or *vocation*. God offers forgiveness of sins and right standing with himself through the offer of the Gospel that brings with it sufficient grace for the unconverted to respond to the message.

(2) *Illumination*. The Gospel call universally imparts a certain illumination and quickening that enables the hearer to comprehend the benefits of accepting the Gospel and the consequences of rejecting it.

(3) *Conversion* or *repentance*. This involves the work of the Spirit that leads sinners to remorse for their sins and to knowledge that they may be saved on the basis of Christ's merits.

(4) *Regeneration*. Repentance may result in the kindling of faith in the Gospel and then the transformation known as the new birth.

(5) *Justification*. In response to a person's faith God forgives sins, reck-

ons the perfect righteousness of Christ, and bestows right standing with himself.

(6) *Mystical union*. By this step the believing soul is brought into a supernatural union of love with the triune God.

(7) *Renovation or sanctification*. Assisted by the Spirit, the justified advance in holiness and bring forth the supernatural fruits of the new life.

(8) *Conservation*. Provided that the justified continue to heed biblical warnings about defection and persist in faith, God will preserve them safely to the end. The unbelieving, however, may fall away from grace and forfeit salvation. Christians must not presume on the Spirit's grace.

Arminian theology typically represents the order of salvation as follows.

(1) *Universal, external calling*. God extends the call to salvation to all by a general work of the Spirit on the soul and by explicit Gospel proclamation. Prevenient or "exciting" grace, which allegedly proceeds universally from the Cross, alleviates the effects of depravity, thereby freeing all persons for moral and spiritual action.

(2) *Repentance and faith*. Since every person is transformed by prevenient grace, the human will is capable of freely turning from sin unto Christ. Given the fact that God commands sinners to work out their own salvation (Phil 2:12), conversion is a synergistic activity.

(3) *Justification*. Since God does not declare anyone righteous in principle who is not so in practice, the forensic view of justification (the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believing sinners) often is rejected. Arminians usually define justification as forgiveness of sins that in turn fosters the moral government of the universe.

(4) *Sanctification*. Believers should seek that instantaneous, second-blessing experience by which the Spirit eradicates sin and fills the heart with perfect love for God and others. This second work of grace is denoted "entire sanctification," "Christian perfection," and the "fullness of the blessing." The term regeneration often is used inclusively to embrace the broad movement of salvation from conversion to sanctification.

(5) *Perseverance*. Given their strong emphasis on free agency, many Arminians hold that believers by willful sin may fall completely from the state of grace. The possibility of final apostasy motivates Christians to holiness and constancy of life.

Covenant Reformed theology insists that every aspect of salvation is grounded in the covenant of grace, occurs in union with Christ, and is brought forth by the Holy Spirit.

(1) *Calling*. The general call to trust Christ is issued through the widespread offer of the Gospel. By means of this general call God sovereignly

issues a special calling to the elect. The Spirit facilitates sinners’ response to the Gospel by enlightening their minds, liberating their wills, and inclining their affections Godward.

(2) *Regeneration*. Without any human assistance the third person of the Trinity creates new spiritual life, including God-honoring dispositions, affections, and habits.

(3) *Faith*. Having been granted new spiritual life, the elect believe the truths of the Gospel and trust Jesus Christ as Savior. Faith is viewed as a gift and enablement of God, indeed as a consequence of new spiritual birth.

(4) *Repentance*. Here believers grieve for sins committed and deliberately turn from all known disobedience. This response likewise is a divine enablement.

(5) *Justification*. On the basis of Christ’s completed work, the Father reckons to believers the righteousness of his Son, remits sins, and admits the same to the divine favor. Justification is the legal declaration of believing sinners’ right standing with God.

(6) *Sanctification*. The Holy Spirit works in justified believers the will and the power progressively to renounce sin and to advance in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness. By the process of sanctification God makes believers experientially holy.

(7) *Preservation and perseverance*. The God who has chosen, regenerated, justified, and sealed believers with his Spirit preserves them by his faithfulness and power to the very end. True believers persevere by virtue of the divine preservation.

(8) *Glorification*. God will complete the redemption of the saints when the latter behold Christ at his second advent and are transformed into his likeness.

Evangelicals in the broadly Reformed tradition insist that the whole of salvation, from eternity past to eternity future, proceeds from the grace of God, centers on Christ, and is wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(1) *Election*. Without regard for foreseen human faith or good works, God in eternity past chose from among the lot of fallen humanity some to inherit eternal life.

(2) *Effectual calling*. The Spirit of God illumines the minds and softens the wills of the elect, thus enabling them personally to respond to the external call of the Gospel.

(3) *Belief in the Gospel*. Quickened by the Spirit, the minds of the elect are persuaded of the truths of the Gospel of God’s grace.

(4) *Repentance*. Likewise enabled by the Spirit the effectually called despise and turn away from all known sins.

(5) *Trust in Christ*. The effectually called personally commit themselves to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of their life.

(6) *Regeneration*. God creates in justified believers new life, defined as the radical reorientation of the dispositions and affections toward God.

(7) *Union with Christ*. The Spirit unites newly born saints with Jesus Christ in a vital, spiritual, and indissoluble union. The NT describes this experiential reality by the familiar “in Christ” motif.

(8) *Justification*. God in turn reckons believing sinners righteous in his sight and bestows upon them the gift of eternal life.

(9) *Sanctification*. By a lifelong process that involves both ups and downs the Spirit of grace gradually transforms true believers into the image of Jesus Christ.

(10) *Preservation and perseverance*. By the application of divine power, God faithfully preserves regenerate saints in faith and hope unto the attainment of eternal life.

(11) *Glorification*. God perfects the final and complete redemption of the believer—body, soul, and spirit—at the *Parousia* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We now turn to the NT documents to determine if an order or arrangement of the doctrines of salvation can be substantiated. We examine first those texts that deal most comprehensively with the plan of salvation. Consider the following major Scripture passages.

Paul presents a broad outline of the plan of salvation in Rom 8:28-30, popularly known as the “golden circle of salvation.” God’s *foreknowledge* and *predestination* undergird other aspects of salvation, given here as *calling*, *justification*, and *glorification*. Verses 31-39 affirm the certainty of God’s *preservation* of elect believers.

In 1 Cor 1:26-30 Paul gives the order of salvation as God’s choosing or *election*, *calling*, *union with Christ* (“in Christ Jesus”), *justification*, and *sanctification*.

Paul’s order in Eph 1:11-14 is *election* through Christ the Redeemer, *faith* defined as “hope in Christ,” *union with Christ*, *sealing* with the Spirit, and *glorification*, viewed as the final “redemption.”

In 2 Thess 2:13-15 the following order is evident: *election* as the act of God’s choosing, *belief* in “the truth,” *calling* through the Gospel, and *glorification*. Verse 15 upholds the need for *perseverance* in the faith.

In 2 Tim 1:8-10 Paul writes of grace that undergirds *election* viewed as God’s saving “purpose,” *calling*, *sanctification* as a “holy life,” and future *glorification*, here designated as “life and immortality.”

In language drawn from the OT, 1 Pet 1:1-2 delineates the order of salvation as *foreknowledge*, *election*, *effectual calling* expressed as “the sanctifying work of the Spirit,” *faith* identified as “obedience to Jesus

Christ,” and *justification* and *sanctification*, both perhaps implied by the phrase “sprinkling by his blood.”

Finally, 2 Pet 1:9-11 discusses *election*, *calling*, *justification*, *perseverance*, and *glorification*.

Many biblical texts, though less comprehensive than the preceding, are nevertheless helpful in the search for a possible ordering of soteriological doctrines. Consider the following scriptural passages.

Tit 2:11-14 refers to saving *grace*, *sanctification* of life, and *glorification*.

Acts 13:48 gives the order *election* (“appointed for eternal life”) and *faith*.

Eph 1:4 refers to *election* through Christ and *sanctification* (“be holy and blameless”).

Eph 1:5 cites sovereign *election* through Christ and *adoption* as sons and daughters of God.

Acts 16:14 specifies *effectual calling* (opening the heart) and *faith* (response to the Gospel message).

Acts 26:18 sets forth the order of *effectual calling* (“open their eyes”), *conversion* (including “*faith*”), and *positional sanctification* or *justification*.

John 6:44, 65 gives the order *effectual calling* and coming to Christ in *faith*.

2 Pet 1:2-4 cites the doctrines of *grace*, *effectual calling*, *faith*, *union with Christ* (“participate in the divine nature”), and *sanctification* (“escape the corruption in the world”), although the precise order is less intentional in this text.

1 Thess 5:23-24 presents the sequence as *effectual calling*, *sanctification*, and *preservation* (“kept blameless”).

Many NT texts—e.g., John 5:24; Rom 1:17; 3:22, 26, 28, 30; 4:3, 5, 11, 13; Gal 2:16; 3:6, 8, 11, 24; Phil 3:9—refer to the *faith* that results in *justification*.

John 1:12-13 highlights *faith*, *regeneration* (“born of God”), and *adoption* (“become children of God”). In this text regeneration precedes adoption into the family of God.

2 Pet 1:5-6, 9 affirms *faith*, *justification* (“cleansed from past sins”), and *perseverance*.

Rom 5:1-2 (cf. Gal 5:5) presents the sequence as *faith*, *justification*, *reconciliation* (“peace with God”), and *glorification* (“the hope of the glory of God”).

Gal 3:26-27 depicts *faith*, *union with Christ* (“baptized into Christ”), and *adoption*.

First John 5:1-5 sets forth the order of *faith*, *regeneration* (“born of God”), and *sanctification* (“overcomes the world”).

First John 2:5-6 (cf. Gal 2:20) describes *faith* (“obeys his word”), *union with Christ* (“we are in him”), and *sanctification* (“walk as Jesus did”).

First Pet 1:22-23 affirms *faith* (“obeying the truth”), *sanctification*, and *regeneration*. Faith results in both regeneration and sanctification, although the order of the last two is not explicitly stated here.

First Pet 1:5, 9 identifies *faith*, *preservation*, and *glorification* (“the salvation . . . to be revealed in the last time”).

First John 3:5-6 refers to *justification* (“take away our sins”) followed by *sanctification* (does not “keep on sinning”).

Rom 8:1-2 speaks of *union with Christ* (“in Christ Jesus”), *justification* (“no condemnation”), and *sanctification* (“set me free from the law of sin and death”).

First John 3:9-10 describes *regeneration* (“born of God”), *adoption*, and *sanctification* (“cannot go on sinning”).

Heb 12:1-11 indicates that *adoption* precedes *sanctification* and *perseverance*.

Rom 8:13-17 gives the order as *adoption* (“sons of God”), *sanctification* (“put to death the deeds of the body”), and *glorification* (“share in his glory”).

John 3:3, 5 identifies the particular order of *regeneration* and the attainment of *eternal life* (“enter the kingdom of God”).

First Pet 1:3-4 cites *regeneration* (“new birth”) and *glorification* (“an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade”).

Second Cor 5:17-18 describes *union with Christ* through *faith*, *regeneration* (“a new creation”), and *reconciliation*, although the ordering relation is not clearly given.

First Cor 6:17-20 describes *union with Christ* and *sanctification* of life.

Finally, Eph 5:23, 26-27 delineates the order of *union with Christ* (the “body” of Christ image), *sanctification*, and possibly *glorification*.

What shall we conclude about attempts to construct an order of salvation for purposes of systematization and study? In recent years the notion of an ordering of the doctrines of salvation has come under criticism by theologians such as Karl Barth, G.C. Berkouwer, H.N. Ridderbos, and O. Weber. Admittedly, it is difficult to schematize temporally the boundless riches of God’s saving grace exercised from eternity past to eternity future. Moreover, it is possible that the *ordo* as a rigid structure may direct our focus away from Christ to an unhealthy psychologizing of salvation (subjectivism). Nevertheless, it remains true that our God is a God of order rather than disorder or confusion. Indeed, the many Scripture texts cited above appear to provide a warrant for conceptualizing the process of salvation in an orderly manner. Within the unity of the plan of salvation it is

legitimate to consider various aspects of God’s gracious salvation in relation to one another. One’s conversion may be sudden and dramatic or so gradual that the person may not know when he or she came to Christ. But a genuine salvation experience will share common doctrinal aspects as certified by the Scriptures.

Granting the legitimacy of the order of salvation, certain qualifications regarding such a formulation must be made. (1) The order of salvation includes things that God does (election, calling, justification, regeneration, etc.) as well as things that humans do (belief, repentance, trust, perseverance). (2) The *ordo* must be viewed as a logical as well as a chronological relation. Conversion, regeneration, union with Christ, and justification occur simultaneously in the moment of decision for Christ, and not successively. (3) Certain aspects of the scheme of salvation are not discrete events but realities that pervade the entire Christian life: e.g., belief, repentance, trust, sanctification, divine preservation, and human perseverance. (4) As Berkouwer and Hoekema point out,¹⁵ aspects of the salvation experience are interactive. Thus faith is active in justification, in sanctification, and in perseverance. Moreover, union with Christ (abiding in him) is essential for sanctification and perseverance. Hence the order of salvation must not be viewed simplistically as a linear sequence of chronological occurrences. And finally (5) every aspect of salvation profoundly focuses on Christ. Thus Christ apportions grace (Eph 4:7). Moreover, saints are elected in Christ (Eph 1:4); they are called to Christ (1 Cor 1:9); they believe the truth about Christ (Rom 10:9; 1 John 5:1, 5); they turn to Christ in repentance (1 Pet 2:25); they are justified by the blood of Christ (Heb 13:12); regeneration takes place in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Tit 3:5-6); they are united with Christ (Gal 2:20); they are transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18); they are kept and preserved by Christ (1 John 5:18); and they will receive the glory of Christ (2 Thess 2:14). Given these significant observations and qualifications, we suggest the following ordering of the various aspects of the salvation wrought by Christ on the cross (Atonement), which constitutes the structure of this volume.

The *Plan and Provision of Salvation* from beginning to end is rooted in God’s grace and originates with God’s sovereign elective decision for life made in eternity past.

The *Application of Salvation* in its subjective aspects commences with the Spirit’s effectual calling and continues in the movements of conversion and regeneration. In its objective aspects the fruit of Christ’s work applied to believers includes union with Christ, justification, and adoption into the family of God.

The *Progress of Salvation* is manifested through the Holy Spirit’s sanc-

tification or purification of believers' lives and the divine preservation that enables human perseverance to the end.

Finally, the *Perfecting of Salvation* will be realized in the glorification of true believers at Christ's second advent. In this consummation of the entire movement of salvation, Christians will be perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

V. THE AUTHOR OF SALVATION

The rich biblical data indicate that salvation is a work of the triune God involving an authentic response on the part of the individual person. On God's side, Scripture depicts the *Father* as the ultimate source, planner, and initiator of salvation. Thus the apostle Paul wrote in Eph 1:3-6: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." James confirmed this initiating role of the Father in salvation, as follows: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. . . . He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created" (1:17-18). Other texts affirming the Father's role as planner and initiator of salvation include 2 Tim 1:9 and 1 John 4:14.

Second, *Christ the Son* provided complete redemption through his obedient life and atoning death. After citing the Father's role in salvation Paul explained the Son's unique contribution in Eph 1:7-12. There he wrote, "In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (vv. 7-8). We recall, in addition, the words of an angel of the Lord who said to Joseph, the husband of Mary, "you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). The Father effects redemption through Christ, the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tim 2:5). He is the mediator of the new covenant, whereby the called receive the promised eternal inheritance (Heb 9:15; cf. 8:6; 12:24).

Finally, the *Holy Spirit* applies, makes effective, and preserves the redemption Christ bought to those who believe. Eph 1:13-14 specifies an important work the third person of the Trinity performs in the economy

of salvation: “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.” Lloyd-Jones expressed the saving work of the three persons according to Eph 1:3-14 thusly: “The Father has His purpose, the Son says He is going to carry it out, and He came and did it, and the Holy Spirit said He was ready to apply it.”¹⁶ Summing up the diverse functions of the Spirit in salvation, we note that the latter effectually calls (Heb 3:7-8; Rev 22:17), justifies (1 Cor 6:11), regenerates (John 3:5-8; 6:63; Tit 3:5), unites with Christ (1 Cor 12:13), seals (Eph 1:13; 4:30), sanctifies (Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13; Gal 5:16, 25), and provides assurance by his own invincible testimony (Rom 8:16). In addition to Eph 1:3-14, Paul summarized the saving functions of the three persons in Tit 3:4-6. There the apostle wrote, “when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

On the human side no person can come savingly to God by the power of their own initiative or on the basis of their own merits, as the Titus text just cited indicates. But men and women, enabled by the Spirit’s gracious working, perform their own necessary work. To receive salvation the chosen must believe the Gospel (John 20:30-31), repent of sins (Acts 2:38; Rev 3:3, 19), trust or commit themselves to Christ (Rom 10:9; 2 Tim 1:12), pursue holiness and sanctification of life (2 Tim 2:21; Heb 12:14), and persevere in the way of Christ (Matt 24:13; John 8:31; 1 Cor 16:13-14). Salvation thus is both a work of God and of the individual, where the latter’s effort and cooperation is graciously enabled by God. Paul made this point perfectly clear in his exhortation to the Philippian Christians: “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil 2:12-13).

VI. THE RELATION OF SOTERIOLOGY TO OTHER DOCTRINES

Given the organic and inherently coherent nature of biblical theology, we are not surprised to find significant interrelationship between the doctrine of salvation and other Christian doctrines. Consider first the doctrine of *theology proper*. A high estimate of God’s sovereignty, love, and grace leads the faithful student of Scripture to ascribe the initiative in salvation

to God himself. God in freedom works to bring about his own eternal purpose for the human race. On the other hand, a liberal or deistic understanding of God envisages the Creator as relatively uninvolved in the process of bringing salvation to sinners. According to the latter perspective, the unconverted forge their future by their own moral decisions and actions independently of God.

Reflect also on the doctrine of divine *providence*. The postulate that God is the efficient cause of all occurrences (hyper-Calvinism) leads to the conclusion that the Lord in eternity past sovereignly planned both the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the reprobate. On the other hand, the insistence that God merely extends to the unconverted the promise of rewards and the threat of punishment (Arminianism) places the salvation of the unconverted squarely with themselves. The view that God works by supernatural means to draw some sinners to Christ and for his own good reasons leaves others in their self-chosen state of sin leads to an altogether different outcome (moderately Reformed).

Consider also the doctrines of *anthropology* and *hamartiology*. Acceptance of the Bible's realistic view of the effects of depravity upon the mind, will, and affections (Augustinianism) leads to the conclusion that God himself provides the spiritual dynamic that effectively brings moral aliens to Christ. On the other hand, the view that human nature is not fallen in sin (Pelagianism) eliminates the need for spiritual redemption altogether. According to Pelagians old and new, whatever persons need to do for salvation, they are capable of accomplishing by their own strength. The mediating position that human nature was merely wounded by the Fall (Semi-Pelagianism) envisages salvation as the outcome of a synergistic process of cooperation between God and the unconverted.

Thoroughly pertinent is the doctrine of *Christology*, which deals with the person of Jesus Christ and the work he accomplished. The commonly held modern view that Jesus was a mere man indwelt by divine power and thus our moral example obviates the need for justification and reconciliation predicated on his atoning death at Calvary. Contrariwise, the conviction that Jesus Christ, the God-man, bore the punishment due our sins and so satisfied the demands of a righteous God leads to the classical understanding of the new birth, justification, and reconciliation. Moreover, whether or not Jesus bodily rose from the grave profoundly affects the future resurrection of those who trust him. Likewise his ascension to heaven, session at the Father's right hand, and continuing intercession on our behalf significantly impacts the quality and permanence of the spiritual life we profess to have received.

The doctrine of the *Holy Spirit* likewise impinges upon the quest for sal-

vation. Understood merely as an impersonal power or influence, the Spirit could not convict hardened souls of sin, impart a new nature with heavenly qualities, sanctify the life in the path of holiness, or fortify believers to persevere in the faith. But the Spirit who truly is an intelligent, divine person—even the third person of the Trinity—possesses the infinite wisdom, power, and grace to save, sanctify, and sustain born-again believers to the very end.

The doctrine of *ecclesiology* impinges upon our understanding of Christian salvation. The liberal view that equates the church with the world undercuts the need for supernatural salvation. Evangelical theology, however, envisages the church as the chosen people called out of the godless world and transformed by divine grace. Moreover, our view of the efficacy of the church’s sacraments will impact our understanding of how God applies salvation to sinners and causes it to be perfected. The Roman church, for example, claims that the sacraments accomplish their saving work simply because performed by legitimate authority (the *ex opere operato* concept).

Finally, soteriology is relevant to the doctrine of *eschatology*. Personal eschatology deals with the resurrection body, the disposition of persons at the final judgment, and their final state in heaven or hell. A humanistic worldview that denies life beyond the grave takes no account of the glorious future of God’s people. Soteriology treats this latter issue under the head of the glorification of the saints. General eschatology considers the grand truths of Christ’s return to earth, the inauguration of his kingdom, and the new heaven and new earth. These great realities represent the future blessings of soteriology considered from a corporate point of view. In sum, the close nexus between soteriology and other major doctrines confirms the fact that Christianity is more than a noble ethical system. The way of Christ, in its warp and woof, is the path of salvation itself.

N O T E S

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7. Norman Pittenger, *Process Thought and the Christian Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 47. Pittenger adds, *Abounding Grace* (London & Oxford: Mowbray, 1981), p. 23: "He does his work . . . by eliciting from them their own free response, as they answer to the lures, persuasions, invitations, and solicitations which press in upon them; and he asks them to decide for the right things in the right way."
8. Hilary of Potiers, cited in W.T. Whitley, ed., *The Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 111.