Systematic Theology: Soteriology

Week 1: What is soteriology? Why study it? And much more.

## Introduction to the series

* When you hear the word *soteriology*, what does mean to you?
* Some think of high theology, stuffy rooms, and old men arguing over large oak tables.
* Others think…I have no idea what that word means…and I probably don’t care even if I did.
* Hopefully you land somewhere between these two descriptions.
* Simply put, soteriology is the study of salvation or the study of the doctrine of salvation.
* In other words, it is the study of what one group of people believe about salvation. That group can be anything from a church to a political party. For our purposes, we are going to study what the Bible says.
* It is important to have a full and broad understanding of what the Bible says about our salvation so that we know that we are saved and so that we know what comes with our salvation.
* There are many different ideas and teachings about salvation, and it is our responsibility to make sure that we know what God has ordained and expects from His creation.
* Here is schedule for the upcoming lessons:
	+ **09/08: Introduction**
	+ 09/15: What is the atonement, both declarative and practical?
	+ 09/22: What does effectual calling, faith and repentance mean?
	+ 09/29: Missionary Share: Tim George from Mozambique
	+ 10/06: What is justification or what does it mean to be justified?
	+ 10/13: What does it mean to be adopted by God?
	+ 10/20: What is progressive sanctification and how does it operate in my daily Christian life?
	+ 10/27: Missionary Share: Jeff Street from Canada
	+ 11/03: What does the perseverance of the saints mean for me today and for eternity?

## introduction

* The doctrine of salvation comes in a particular order within systematic theology…and for good reason.
* Most systematic theologies are organized in a similar way:
	+ Bibliology, the study of the Word of God.
	+ Theology Proper, the study of God the Father.
	+ Angelology, the study of angels and demons.
	+ Anthropology and hamartiology, the study of man and sin.
	+ Christology, the study of Christ.
	+ Soteriology, the study of salvation.
	+ Pneumatology, the study of the Holy Spirit
	+ Ecclesiology, the study of the church.
	+ Eschatology, the study of the last things or end times.
* If you notice, the study of salvation comes in a logical place.
* You must know God’s Word, have a fundamental basis for your understanding.
* From God’s Word, we can know who God is, what He did, and what He expects.
* We then can know about our issues as mankind, we are sinners in need of a savior.
* Then we read about our Savior, Jesus Christ.
* It is then we get to our salvation, what was done for us in our greatest need.

## What are some dangers of systematic theology?

* Just like any system of study that man comes up with, we must be cognizant of the inherent dangers that we bring from ourselves.
* **Chiefly among all dangers is that of our interpretation**.
	+ With systematic theology, since we are taking texts alone as they are, we must be careful to perform our exegesis *before* getting to our systematic theology.
* There may be a tendency to force Scriptures into a system that really does not belong there.
	+ For example, **2 Peter 3:9** “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.”
		- **For the Arminian** “The idea that God chooses some for salvation and then the remainder of humanity is reprobated to hell is a doctrine that neither scripture nor logic can support. If God is a maximumly great being, as Anselm argued for,then the maximumly great being must be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnibenevolent. Unless one wants to state that God is not omnibenevolent, then God, who is all-loving, must want the best for all people. This philosophical idea is supported by scripture here in 2 Peter 3:9.”[[1]](#footnote-2)
		- **From a Calvinistic point of view** “The context indicates that any and all are limited to the elect–namely all those whom the Lord has chosen and will call to Himself. Put another way, Christ will not come back until every person whom God has chosen is saved. By using the term you (a reference to Peter’s believing readers), the apostle limits any and all to the realm of elect human beings.”[[2]](#footnote-3)
* Both interpretations cannot be right, either the elect is in focus or anyone without regards to election.
* This is where our exegesis becomes very important as we read and use systematic theologies. We must remember that men who write these books are not infallible…they are not inspired by the Holy Spirit.
	+ They come to the text with their own bias and (hopefully) do their best to interpret the text.[[3]](#footnote-4)
* As Tim Challies says “Systematic theology can provide Bible interpreters with an accurate theological grid. This is a tremendous gift, but a gift that can be abused. Instead of treating systematic theology as a servant, you can allow it to become the master. You can become preoccupied with a system rather than the Bible, and that’s just a step away from giving more weight to the system and letting it substitute for the Bible.”[[4]](#footnote-5)
* If we are looking for texts to prove our point, then we have become a slave to a system. But if we desire to have the text conform our thinking, then we will give up our system in favor of what the Bible says.
	+ There is **no system** which is completely perfect and airtight. Each system was made by man and has pieces which may not completely go together.
	+ This is, as we discussed in the last class, where covenantalism and dispensationalism really take different paths when interpreting the text.

## Where in the Bible do we read about soteriology?

* This is why systematic theology will typically start with the study of the Bible. Before getting into any interpretation or application, we need to know what the Bible says about a topic.
* Systematic theology is the process of looking at every text in the Bible which connects to a specific topic.
	+ Worthy of note, biblical theology is not more biblical than systematic theology. Biblical theology does not look at every text that a topic has in the Bible.
	+ Biblical theology traces a topic or theme throughout the Scriptures to see, not only what the whole Bible has to say about a topic, but to also see how that topic has developed over time.
	+ Both biblical and systematic theology play an important role in our study and understanding.
* There are two ways this word for salvation is used in the Bible.
* First, it refers to our Savior.
* σωτήρ…a deliverer, i.e. God or Christ; –savior.[[5]](#footnote-6)
* **Luke 2:11** “…for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”
* **Philippians 3:20** “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ…”
* **1 Timothy 2:3** “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior…”
* **Titus 2:13** “…looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus…”
	+ The Bible speaks of both God *and* Jesus as being our savior.
* Second, it refers to the act of saving someone.
* The word for *to save*, σῴζω, in the New Testament.
	+ This is the verbal form where σωτηρία, the noun, comes from. There is some study on how these two words are used differently, but there is no debate whether they are used in reference to a Savior who saves His people.
* σωτηρία… noun; rescue or safety (physically or morally):—deliver, health, salvation, save, saving.
* **Acts 4:12** “And 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.”
* **Romans 1:16** “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”
* **2 Corinthians 7:10** “For 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.”
* **Philippians 2:12** “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling…”
* **1 Thessalonians 5:9** “For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ…”
* **1 Peter 1:9** “…obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”
* This act of salvation from sin is where our study is going to take place for the next 7 weeks.
* There are dozens more Scriptures which speak of our Great Savior and our salvation.
* In the Bible, salvation has three aspects: past, present and future.
	+ In our 7-week class we are going to cover all of those and what they mean for the believer.
* Here is an example of how the Bible talks about our **past salvation**:
	+ **Ephesians 2:8-9** “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.”
		- ἐστε σεσῳσμένοι – “…you have been saved…”
			* σεσῳσμένοι – Perfect Passive Participle (plural…you all…)
			* The perfect tense in Greek is used to describe a completed action which produced results which are still in effect all the way up to the present.[[6]](#footnote-7)
			* The passive voice is when the subject is the recipient of the action. If the subject of the sentence is being acted upon, then the verb is referred to as being in the passive voice.[[7]](#footnote-8)
			* A participle is considered a "verbal adjective". It is often a word that ends with an "-ing" in English (such as "speaking," "having," or "seeing"). It can be used as an adjective, in that it can modify a noun (or substitute as a noun), or it can be used as an adverb and further explain or define the action of a verb.[[8]](#footnote-9)
		- This is why our exegesis is very important, not just for what we believe but when we start to put together our systematic theology.
		- Notice there are two very important parts to this participle…perfect and passive.
		- It is an act, you being saved, which took place in the past *and* without you doing anything. You were acted upon for your salvation, you did not act for your salvation.
* Here is an example of how the Bible talks about our **present salvation**:
	+ **1 Corinthians 1:18** “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.”
		- ἐστίν τοῖς δὲ σῳζομένοις ἡμῖν – “…to us who are being saved…”
		- In Greek, however, the present tense primarily tells us the type of action.  The Greek present tense indicates continued action, something that happens continually or repeatedly, or something that is in the process of happening.  If you say, for instance, “The sun is rising,” you are talking about a process happening over a period of time, not an instantaneous event. The Greeks use the present tense to express this kind of continued action.[[9]](#footnote-10)
		- The passive, just as before, means the subject of the sentence is being acted upon.
		- Just like before, this is a participle.
	+ Interestingly, the perfect tense, you have been saved is a past event…the present tense is something that is continually happening with no reference to when it will stop.
	+ Salvation, then, in its present reality, allows us to slowly but continually be freed from the power of sin. Having been once-for-all declared right in God’s eyes, we have been freed from our guilt and now can begin to be freed from sin’s power.[[10]](#footnote-11)
* Here is an example of how the Bible says our salvation is **future**:
	+ **Romans 10:9** “…that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, *you will be saved*…”
		- This is a future, passive, indicative verb.
		- But there is only one future tense, and the Greeks had to use it to cover all the possible types of action. It is probably best to assume that most future tense verbs are describing simple actions, without including extra concepts like continued action. This is not an area where you should build elaborate arguments on the grammar.[[11]](#footnote-12)
		- Passive, once again, the subject is being acted upon in the sentence.
		- We face a slightly different situation when we deal with verbs in the indicative mood, the verb form used for statements of fact.[[12]](#footnote-13) **We did not become savable but saved.**
	+ When you put this together, there is something acting upon you that states the fact that in the future you will be saved.
* Each of these aspects of salvation are going to be discussed as we go through the next weeks of classes. To give you an idea of what is coming:
	+ Effectual Calling…Ephesians 2:8-9…God calls those whom He has already saved. Therefore, when they are called, they come.
	+ Progressive Sanctification…1 Corinthians 1:8…as we are being saved, we are becoming more and more like Christ in the process.
	+ Perseverance of the Saints…Romans 10:9…if we have been called and are being sanctified, then there is a stated fact that we will also be saved in the future.
* These are just some of the ways knowing more about our salvation can give us confidence and comfort as we walk with the Lord through this life.
* Don’t think that it is paramount that you learn Hebrew or Greek. Our modern translations do a very good job of bringing out passive, imperative, and other types of verbs.
* It is our job then to make sure that when we read the text in English, we are paying attention to what the actual text is saying.
* When we discuss our salvation and we continually read that there was someone (God, Jesus) or something (grace) acting upon us, it should have an impact on our hearts as to how we view our salvation.
* We did not come to the Lord because we saw how bad we were. We did not initiate our own salvation because we have some goodness in us. We were acted upon by an outside force so that we are saved.

## why should we study this topic?

* As we will come to see over this study, our great salvation has so much more for us than God simply saving us from eternal damnation.

### The more we know about salvation the more we know the love of God towards us.

* While that certainly is nothing to simply write off, the present application of all that God has done (and continues to do) for us, is vastly understudied, underestimated, and often times pushed to the side.
* God did not have to do anything for us…He could have judged us after our first sin, and we would have been justly sent to hell for eternity.
* He could have just saved us by sending Jesus to die for us.
* The benefits of salvation, adoption, the seal of the Spirit, sanctification, etc. are all bonuses from God that show His great love, mercy and kindness towards us.
* There are aspects and benefits which have an impact on how we live today and what we have to look forward to in the future.
* By studying the fullness of our salvation, it gives us a fuller picture of who God is and how He takes care of His people.

### It keeps us from straying into heresy and self-righteousness.

* When we have a picture of our salvation from God’s point of view, it puts us in our proper place.
* There are many other theories about how man is saved and what man must to do be save and how man can keep himself saved.
	+ These all fall short when aligned with what the Scriptures teach concerning our salvation.
* When we study what God has done for us, we quickly realize that our salvation has nothing to do with us but everything to do with God and His great mercy towards us.

Praise God for the act of salvation he has accomplished in the life of every believer, the act which has delivered us from the power of guilt and which has erased our guilt in His eyes. Praise God for his ongoing salvation, whereby He gives us His authority so we can overcome the power of sin. Praise God for the promise of salvation which allows us to look forward with eager anticipation to the time when we will finally be freed from sin’s presence.[[13]](#footnote-14)

1. <https://soteriology101.com/2022/02/22/election-means-to-choose/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. MacArthur, *2 Peter & Jude*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://slidetodoc.com/biblical-counselor-training-class-lesson-1-definition-theology/> (the above diagram) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.challies.com/articles/10-strengths-and-10-dangers-of-systematic-theology/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Strong’s Definitions [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://ezraproject.com/greek-tenses-explained/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/participles.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. <https://ezraproject.com/greek-tenses-explained/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <https://www.challies.com/articles/salvation-a-past-present-future-reality/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. <https://ezraproject.com/greek-tenses-explained/> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. <https://www.challies.com/articles/salvation-a-past-present-future-reality/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)