

The Doctrine of Salvation

I. Some Beginnings of Salvation in the Old Testament

- Adam & Eve: The promise of an offspring/descendant who will defeat (Gen. 3:15)
- Noah: Salvation from judgment (Gen. 6-9)
- Law of Moses: Salvation by means of atoning, sacramental sacrifices
- Psalm 110: Salvation from a Priest-King
- Isaiah: Salvation from a suffering Servant/King from David's lineage who bears the sins of his people as a substitute and sacrifice and who reigns with God's power and justice over all things (Isa. 9:1-7; 11:1-9; 42:1-9; 52:13-53:12).

II. Union with Christ

- Salvation accomplished and applied
 - Jesus accomplished salvation by his life, death, and resurrection. He overcame sin and death and personally embodies a perfect life of righteousness and love with God and others.
 - God applies salvation to us by uniting us to Christ by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection cannot save us unless we are personally connected to him. Thus, the effects and benefits of Jesus' saving work for us must be applied to us and in us by God.
- Union with Christ
 - Definition: Union with Christ or being "in Christ" refers to Jesus living in us (and we in him) by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1-4; Rom. 8:1-2, 9). God comes to live within us personally, bringing us into a living spiritual bond and connection with God in the person of Christ. This is one of the most common ways that the New Testament uses to describe salvation, and this category includes all the dimensions of salvation.
 - Covenant: Union with Christ is the New Testament's way of describing covenant relationship with God, the core blessing of which is God's dwelling in the midst of his people so that they live with him.
 - One reality, many dimensions: The order of salvation is not a set of different, separate "packages" or experiences God gives to us in a series of different, separate transactions. Rather, it is best understood as different dimensions or aspects of the one reality of union with Christ by the Holy Spirit. (Like a diamond with many facets or the combination of melody, harmony, and rhythm in a piece of music.)

Westminster Larger Catechism #66

Q. What is that union which the elect have with Christ?

A. The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.

Westminster Shorter Catechism #30

Q. How does the Holy Spirit apply to us the redemption Christ bought?

A. The Spirit applies to us the redemption Christ bought by producing faith in us and so uniting us to Christ in our effective calling.

III. Order of Salvation

- Effects of sin (review)
 - Guilt: being condemned as a lawbreaker and liable to punishment
 - Wrath: God's just anger at evil
 - Alienation: broken relationships
 - Corruption of human nature: an inclination/bent toward sin
 - Death: spiritual and physical
 - Misery: the brokenness of the rest of the world that damages us

- Election/Predestination in Christ
 - From all eternity, God chose some people for salvation in Christ (Eph. 1:3-5, 11; Rom. 8:29-30; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; John 6:37-40; 15:16; 17:2; Acts 13:48).
 - God's choice has in view people who are sinners. Because of sin and its effects, we have no inherent right to demand God's salvation as a matter of justice. Election highlights that salvation is truly a gift of grace, which is undeserved, unmerited favor.
 - Election always works its way out in history (in some mysterious manner beyond our knowledge or understanding) in conjunction with the free, responsible choices of human beings. God's sovereign will does not negate human freedom but mysteriously works in and through it.

- Regeneration = salvation from spiritual death
 - Regeneration is God's making spiritually dead people come alive to God in Christ (Eph. 1:20, 2:5-6). This is being "born again" by being "born from above" (John 3:3-8).
 - We are made alive in Christ because he has life in himself (John 5:25) and he is the source of our life (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1-4).
 - This new life enables us to respond to God with faith/belief, which is why faith itself is a gift of God's grace (Eph. 2:8). This saving faith is not only assent to knowledge known by reason (although it is not less than that in its mature expression) but also a personal trust and dependence by which a person enters into a living relationship with God.

- Justification = salvation from guilt and the wrath of God
 - Justification is a legal status that means to be declared and accepted as righteous by God with respect to his law, i.e., not guilty, free from condemnation (Rom. 3:24-26; 4:1-8; Gal. 2:15-21; Phil. 3:4-14). This declaration entails or implies the forgiveness of sins and the turning away of God's wrath. Forgiveness and justification are like two sides of the same coin, positive and negative ways of referring to the fact that God accepts us as members of his covenant in good standing without holding our sin and guilt against us.
 - We are justified in Christ because God counts or imputes Christ's perfectly righteous status to us. In other words, in union with Christ we share in the righteous status and verdict that Christ receives when he is vindicated as righteous in the judgment of God the Father (1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:3-4).
 - Justification is a free gift of God (Rom. 5:15-17) received by faith alone. It cannot be earned or merited in any way.
 - For believers, justification is past, present, and future. It is a status that we entered in the past when we were initially united to Christ by faith, it is a status that we enjoy continually in the present as God continues to declare and accept us as righteous as long as we are united to Christ, and it is a status that God will declare definitively and publicly over his people in the final judgment.
- Adoption = salvation from the alienation of broken relationships
 - Adoption is God's making people his children (Rom. 8:14-16; Gal. 4:1-8; John 1:12; 1 John 3:1-3) and heirs of the inheritance of his kingdom (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Tit. 3:7). Being adopted into God's family entails reconciliation with God (Rom. 5:1-2, 10; 2 Cor. 5:18-20) and others. As adopted children, God is our heavenly Father, and fellow followers of Christ are brothers and sisters (1 Tim. 3:15; 5:1-2; 1 Cor. 12:12-26).
 - We are adopted in Christ because he is the Son who lives in perfect relationship with God the Father and is the heir of all the riches of God's kingdom (Matt. 21:36-38; Rom. 8:17; Heb. 1:2).
- Sanctification = salvation from the corrupting effects of sin
 - Sanctification is the process of being made holy in our way of life as God liberates us from sin's power and transforms and heals the corruption of our nature. In Christ and by the Spirit, we now have a growing moral/spiritual capacity and desire to recognize and repent of sin by resisting it and putting it to death and to recognize and pursue righteousness by obeying God with increasing faithfulness (Rom. 6:1-14; 8:1-11; Gal. 5:16-26; 1 Cor. 6:11, 19-20; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 1:3-11; Eph. 4:22-24).
 - We are sanctified in Christ because his resurrection life worked in us by the power of his Holy Spirit has the power to overcome all of the corrupting effects of sin and enable us to develop new desires and practices of life.
 - Sanctification is a gift of God's grace that that we receive by faith. It is a process in which we participate actively as living faith expresses itself in the renewal of our minds and wills (Rom. 12:1-2) and in acts of loving obedience that put faith into action (Phil. 2:12-13; Gal. 5:6; James 2:14-26). God's grace is opposed to earning but not to effort.

- Resurrection unto Glorification = salvation from the misery of this life and from physical death
 - Resurrection unto glorification is the future event when God will raise his people from the dead, deliver us from the enemies of sin, Satan, and death and all the miseries of this life forever (Isa. 25:6-9; Rev. 21-22; 1 Cor. 15:35-56; Rom. 8:18-30). It will be the completion of sanctification; we will be completely free of sin's corruption and power and will never sin again. It will also be the freedom from death and all of its effects. We will live in the renewed, resurrected creation with resurrected, immortal bodies in perfect health of body and soul forever.
 - We will be resurrected and glorified in Christ because he was glorified in his resurrection, and we thus receive our glorification from his life and glory (see all the resurrection accounts at the end of the four Gospels; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:20-26; Rev. 1:4-18).

All of these effects can be shared with us individually because they are true of Jesus himself and experienced in his resurrection from the dead. By being united to the risen Jesus personally, we can be:

- Forgiven and declared righteous because Jesus is the Righteous One who has the perfect right standing with the Father and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). The condemnation and penalty he suffered on the cross is finished when the Father vindicates his Son by declares his Son to be righteous in the act of raising him from the dead (the ultimate penalty of sin).
- Reconciled to God and adopted into his family because Jesus is the Son (Rom. 1:3-4; Heb. 2:5-3:6), the one who has the perfect human relationship with the Father and who is the head of God's family.
- Freed from sin's corruption and healed and transformed morally because Jesus is the Holy One who has no sin and is free from its power.
- Liberated from death in resurrection because Jesus is the Resurrected One whose has received new life and conquered death.

Going Further

J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Tyndale, 2001), pp. 157-180.

Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, chapters 15-17.

Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, chapters 20-22.

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Eerdmans 2015).

Robert Peterson, *Election and Free Will: God's Gracious Choice and Our Responsibility* (P & R, 2007).

Rankin Wilbourne, *Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God* (David C. Cook, 2016).

Thomas Schreiner, *Justification: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2023).

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Banner of Truth, 2013).

Graham Cole, *Glorification: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2022).