



*Hebrews 10: 19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*

## **Week 20 - Salvation**

Salvation is the application of the work of Christ to the life of the individual.

1. deliverance, preservation, safety, salvation
  1. deliverance from the molestation of enemies
  2. in an ethical sense, that which concludes to the soul's safety or salvation
    1. of Messianic salvation
2. salvation as the present possession of all true Christians
3. future salvation, the sum of benefits and blessings which the Christians, redeemed from all earthly ills, will enjoy after the visible return of Christ from heaven in the consummated and eternal kingdom of God.

<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4991&t=KJV>

While the term salvation may seem to persons familiar with it to have a somewhat obvious meaning, there are, even within Christian circles, rather widely differing conceptions of what salvation entails.

Before examining these concepts, it will be helpful to look briefly at various details on which they differ. This will give us categories we can use as we analyze the several views.

## Details on Which Conceptions of Salvation Differ

### The Time Dimension (When does “Salvation” occur?)

Some think of salvation as:

- A single occurrence at the beginning of the Christian life.
- A process continuing throughout the Christian life
- Or a future event.

Some Christians regard salvation as basically complete at the initiation of the Christian life. They tend to say, “We have been saved.”

Others see salvation as in process—“we are being saved.”

Yet others think of salvation as something which will be received in the future—“we shall be saved.”

It is, of course, possible to combine two or all three of these views.

In that case, the separate aspects of salvation (e.g., justification, sanctification, glorification) are understood as occurring at different times.

If salvation is thought of as taking place within time, then we must determine the kind of chronological framework that is involved.

Because particular actions can take place in a single moment or over a period of time, salvation and its constituent aspects can be conceived of in several different ways:

1. A series of points: . . . . .
2. A series of discontinuous processes: — — — —
3. A series of overlapping processes: ————— ————— —
4. A single continuous process with distinguishable components: \_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|

## Nature and Center of the Need

A second question relates to the nature and center of the need which must be dealt with.

In the traditional view, our basic deficiency is thought of as being vertical in nature. The primary human problem is separation from God. What is needed is to restore the broken relationship between God and the creature.

This is the evangelical view of salvation.

A second view is that the primary human problem is horizontal.

This may mean that an individual has difficulty in adjusting to other persons, or that there is a fundamental lack of harmony within society as a whole.

Salvation involves the removal of ruptures within the human race, the healing of personal and social relationships.

“Relational theology” is concerned with this process on the level of individual maladjustments and small-group problems. Liberation theologies are concerned with the conflicts between different racial or economic classes.

A third view is that the primary human problem is internal.

The individual is plagued with feelings which must be eradicated— guilt, inferiority, insecurity.

“Adjustment,” “self-understanding,” “self-acceptance,” and “growth in self-esteem” are catchwords here.

### **The Medium of Salvation** (How do we receive salvation?)

The question of how salvation is obtained or transmitted is also highly important.

- Some views regard the transmission of salvation as virtually a physical process.

This is true of certain sacramentalist systems which believe salvation or grace to be obtained by means of a physical object.

For example, in traditional Roman Catholicism, grace is believed to be actually transmitted and received by taking the bread of communion into one’s body.

While the value of the sacrament depends to some extent upon the inward attitude or condition of the communicant, grace is received primarily through the external physical act.

- Others think that salvation is conveyed by moral action.

Here salvation is not so much something possessed by some individual or organization and transmitted to others, as it is something created by altering the state of affairs.

This idea of salvation is found in the social-gospel movement and in liberation theologies.

- Evangelical theologies represent a third idea: salvation is mediated by faith.

Faith appropriates the work accomplished by Christ. The recipient is, in a sense, passive in this process.

## **The Direction of Movement in Salvation**

An additional consideration is the direction of movement in salvation.

Does God work by saving individuals, effecting a personal transformation which proceeds outward into society and changes the world of which the redeemed are a part?

Or does God work by altering the structures of our society and then using these altered structures to change the persons who make it up?

The social-gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was convinced that the basic human problem lies not in a perverted human nature, but in an evil social environment that infects us.

So instead of attempting to cure individuals, we must alter the conditions leading to their illness. We might say that the advocates of the social gospel were proposing a sort of spiritual public-health ministry.

The opposite approach has been advocated by those elements within Christianity that emphasize conversion.

They hold that human nature is radically corrupt. The evils of society result from the fact that it is composed of evil individuals.

Only as there is transformation of these individuals is there any real hope for changing society.

## **The Extent of Salvation**

The extent of salvation is an issue for those who think of salvation as applying to individual persons rather than to society.

The question is, Who or how many members of the human race will be saved?

- The particularist position sees salvation as based upon individual responses to the grace of God. It maintains that not all will respond affirmatively to God; consequently, some will be lost and some saved.

- The universalist position, on the other hand, holds that God will restore all humans to the relationship with him for which they were originally intended. No one will be lost.

There are two varieties of the universalist position.

- One might be a universalist by being an optimistic particularist. That is to say, one might hold both that it is necessary to accept Jesus Christ personally in order to be saved, and that every individual will do so.

Unfortunately, however, it does not appear that everyone in the past has accepted Christ; indeed, countless numbers did not even have the opportunity to do so.

It is not feasible to think of all as being saved in this way, unless there is some sort of unconscious means by which the conditions for salvation can be fulfilled.

- The more common universalist position is to assume that in the end God will on some basis simply accept all persons into eternal fellowship with himself.

In the evangelical view, the primary human problem is our separation from God, the Word of God is his means of presenting to us the salvation found in Christ, and faith is our means of accepting that salvation.

## **Evangelical Theology**

The traditional orthodox or evangelical position on salvation is correlated closely with the orthodox understanding of the human predicament.

In this understanding, the relationship between the human being and God is the primary one.

When that is not right, the other dimensions of life are adversely affected as well.

The Scriptures are understood by the evangelical to indicate that there are two major aspects to the human problem of sin.

- First, sin is a broken relationship with God. The human has failed to fulfil divine expectations, whether by transgressing limitations which God's law has set or by failing to do what is positively commanded there. Deviation from the law results in a state of guilt or liability to punishment.

- Second, the very nature of the person is spoiled as a result of deviation from the law. Now there is an inclination toward evil, a propensity for sin.

Usually termed corruption, this often shows itself in terms of internal disorientation and conflict as well. Beyond that, because we live in the context of a network of interpersonal relationships, the rupture in our relationship with God also results in a disturbance of our relationships with other persons.

## Sin Even Takes On Collective Dimensions

The whole structure of society inflicts hardships and wrongs upon individuals and minority groups. Certain aspects of the doctrine of salvation relate to the matter of one's standing with God.

The individual's legal status must be changed from guilty to not guilty.

This is a matter of one's being declared just or righteous in God's sight, of being viewed as fully meeting the divine requirements.

The theological term here is **justification**. One is justified by being brought into a legal union with Christ.

More is necessary, however, than merely remission of guilt.

Remember that the warm intimacy that should characterize one's relationship with God has been lost.

This problem is rectified by adoption.

In adoption one is restored to favor with God and given the opportunity to **claim all the benefits** provided by the loving Father.

In addition to the need to reestablish one's relationship with God, there is also a need to alter the condition of one's heart.

The basic inclination toward sin to a positive desire to live righteously is termed **regeneration** or, literally, **new birth**.

An actual alteration of one's character is involved, an infusion of a positive spiritual energy.

This, however, is merely the beginning of the spiritual life. There also is a progressive alteration of the individual's spiritual condition; one actually becomes holier.

This progressive subjective change is referred to as **sanctification** ("making holy").

Sanctification finally comes to completion in the life beyond death, when the spiritual nature of the believer will be perfected.

This is termed **glorification**. The individual's maintaining faith and commitment to the very end through the grace of God is perseverance.

## **The Means of Grace**

What, according to the evangelical construction of theology, are the means of salvation or, more broadly put, the means of grace?

In the evangelical view, the Word of God plays an indispensable part in the whole matter of salvation.

*1 Peter 1: 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you*

Thus the Word of God, whether read or preached, is God's means of presenting to us the salvation found in Christ; faith is our means of accepting that salvation.

*Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Works, then, are not a means of receiving salvation. Rather, they are the natural result and evidence of genuine faith. Faith that does not produce works is not real faith. Conversely, works that do not stem from faith and a proper relationship to Christ will have no bearing at the time of judgment.

## **Who Will Be Saved?** (And specifically, will all be saved?)

From time to time, the position that all will be saved has been espoused in the church.

This position, as we mentioned earlier in this chapter, is known as universalism.

The church's usual view throughout history, however, and the view espoused by most evangelicals, is that while some or even many will be saved, some will not.

The church took this position not because it did not want to see everyone saved, but because it believed there are clear statements in Scripture to the effect that some will be lost.

*Matthew 7: 13 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

As we have done with respect to other issues, we will adopt the evangelical position on salvation. Although God is concerned about every human need, both individual and collective, Jesus made clear that the eternal spiritual welfare of the individual is infinitely more important than temporal needs.

## Things To Mull:

1. Before this study when did you believe that salvation occurred? Why? Define when you believe it occurs now. Why?

2. Which of the descriptions of the salvation process best fits Biblical explanation? (*a series of points, a series of discontinuous processes, a series of overlapping processes, a single continuous process with distinguishable components*) Why?

3. Why is it important to define salvation as a vertical restoration rather than a horizontal restoration?

4. What is more important, God saving our society or God saving individuals? Why?

5. When someone says, "There are many ways to get to heaven." Is that an example of a particularist view or a universalist view? Why does it matter?

6. Why is the evangelical view of salvation a personal one rather than a societal theology?

7. Why is it that grace is the best "vehicle" for salvation? What would salvation by "works" look like?

8. Who will be saved?

## Bibliography

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