



THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY 6: THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

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I. Introduction

The doctrine of salvation (soteriology) stands at the heart of Christian theology, not because it is a “more essential” doctrine than any of the others, but because it stands as the gateway for people into the community of believers and into the possession of “true truth.”

The salvation “event” (and there is one) occurs in a moment of time. Nonetheless there are enough distinguishable factors within the doctrine of salvation to view salvation as a logical process of sorts as well. Placement of the distinguishable features of salvation within an *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) will provide an outline for this course:

Note: This is a logical order only, and not a chronological order. Many of these steps occur simultaneously. However, there is a theological priority that commends itself in Scripture.

- **Election:** God’s sovereign choice, in eternity past, of individuals to be recipients of all the salvific benefits of Christ’s atonement.
- **Atonement:** The restoration of man’s broken fellowship with God through the substitutionary removal of guilt and gift of righteousness in satisfaction of God’s legal demands.
- **Union with Christ:** The identification of an individual with the atoning work of Christ that functions as the fountainhead from which every spiritual blessing derives.

Union with Christ is probably the most difficult element of salvation to place in the *ordo salutis*. In the plan of God, we are elected “in Christ” from eternity past (Eph 1:4, 11). We are also regenerated “in Christ” in time (1 Cor 15:22). Of all the terms associated with redemption, John Murray suggests, the umbrella phrase “union with Christ” is perhaps the closest biblical synonym for our word “salvation” and in some sense *is* the list, rather than a line item in it. Because the balance of the elements of salvation flow out of union with Christ, however, I have placed it here.

- **Effectual Call/Regeneration:** The gracious summons whereby God efficaciously ends an individual’s resistance to God by imparting to him the new nature.
- **Definitive Sanctification:** The instantaneous act whereby an individual is set apart to God by making a decisive breach with his slavery to sin.
- **Repentance:** A change of mind and disposition about God, Christ, and sin.
- **Faith:** The appropriation of pardon and forgiveness by means of a full commitment to Christ and trust in his accomplished redemption as revealed in the Scriptures.

Regeneration and definitive sanctification must be paired together as two sides of the same coin: the death of the old man and the creation of a new man are mutual events. Likewise, repentance and faith are necessarily paired. Great debate swirls around the placement of these two pairs of salvific activities. Many passages seem to suggest that faith/repentance precede regeneration/definitive sanctification (John 3:16; 5:24–25; 20:31; 1 Tim 1:16; 1 Pet 1:22–23). Other passages seem to suggest the opposite (John 1:12–13; 3:8; Titus 3:5–7; 1 John 5:1). The decisive factor in developing the *ordo salutis* as it appears in this syllabus, however, is theological: in order for a person to accomplish the *functions* of a new person (faith and repentance), he must first *be* a new person (regeneration and definitive sanctification). See the fuller discussion below.

For a fuller treatment of this thorny issue and an explanation of the texts that seem to place faith before regeneration, see my “Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith in a Theological *Ordo Salutis*,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 7 (2002): 49–93.

- **Justification:** Justification is God’s acceptance of the believer whereby he declares him righteous and treats him as such, based wholly on the imputed righteousness of Christ.
- **Adoption:** The judicial placement of the believer into God’s family as a son and heir to all God’s benefits and provisions.
- **Progressive Sanctification:** The advancement of the believer in his spiritual life negatively by putting to death the remnants of sin and positively by growing in Christian graces.
- **Assurance:** The believer’s personal knowledge and certainty of being in a state of grace and of his final destiny in heaven.
- **Perseverance:** The continuance of the believer in faith, sound doctrine, and good works.
- **Glorification:** The final consummation of salvation wherein the believer is freed from the presence of sin and receives fullness of adoption and resurrection life.

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III. Election

A. Definition: Election is God’s sovereign choice, in eternity past, of individuals to be recipients of all the salvific benefits of Christ’s atonement.

1. Election and Predestination

Predestination or foreordination has reference to God’s overall plan and purpose whereby he eternally, independently, and certainly determines all events in his created universe by the mere counsel of his own will (Eph 1:11; Acts 4:28; Rom 8:29). *Election* has reference specifically to God’s predestination of individuals to salvation (Eph 1:4–5). Predestination is the broad theme of which election is a part.

2. Election and Foreknowledge

Foreknowledge (Rom 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet 1:2) is a synonym for *election*. Foreknowledge in these contexts is not simple “knowledge before the fact.” In its finite form, the verb “to foreknow” (*proginosko*) always has a personal object in Scripture: *people* are foreknown, not facts or events. When God is said to “know” someone, this is not a statement about his possession of information, but a statement of his electing love and sovereign choice of individuals to salvation (see Matt 7:23; Gal 4:9; 2 Tim 2:19; etc.). For more details, see below and also S. M. Baugh, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” in *Still Sovereign*, ed. Schreiner and Ware, 183–200.

B. Views of Election that Deny a Pre-Temporal, Personal Election to Salvation

1. The Corporate Election View

- God has elected Israel: This view says (particularly of Romans 9–11) that God has elected Israel nationally but not individually.
- God has elected the church: This view says that God elected a class or corporate entity and not individual persons. Individuals are saved by joining themselves to this elect body.
- God has elected Christ: This view says that God elected Christ before the foundation of the world, and that we become “elect in Christ” when we join ourselves to him for salvation.

Problems with this view:

- a. Although many texts speak of election in the plural (e.g., Eph 1:4–5), this is inconclusive—it could speak of a group collectively or individually. Much more telling are texts that speak of election in the singular (e.g., Ps 65:4; Rom 9:15 cf. Exod 33:19; Rom 9:18, 19, 21). These can be construed in no way other than individual election.
- b. Romans 9:6–9 clearly indicates that there is a selection of individuals *out of the larger group* of Israel. Cf. also Romans 11:7.

- c. If election is corporate in Romans 8:29–30, then so also must all aspects of salvation be corporate: calling, justification, glorification, etc.
 - d. While there is a corporate election of Israel described in Romans 9 and 11, this should not be confused with the discussion of personal election also in view in this passage. The election to salvation is found in the description of selection of specific vessels within Israel (9:6ff; 19ff; etc.).
2. Election to Sanctification: This view suggests that election is to holiness (Eph 1:4), adoption (Eph 1:5), service (Eph 2:10), or fruitfulness (John 15:16), but not to salvation proper.

Problem with this view: Since election is God’s sovereign choice of individuals to be recipients of *all the benefits of union with Christ*, it should not surprise us to see this language. God *does* elect people unto sanctification. But this does not exclude the fact that God elects people unto salvation itself. Note the following:

Acts 13:48 speaks of appointment *to eternal life*.

1 Thessalonians 1:4ff speaks of election *to faith* and the *reception of the gospel message*.

2 Thessalonians 3:12 says God has chosen us from the beginning *for salvation*.

3. The Election-Based-on-Foreseen-Faith View

This is the standard Arminian view. In this view, election is technically made in eternity past, but is based on God’s knowledge of the future.

Problems with this view:

- a. It is based on a faulty understanding of the term “foreknowledge” (see above).
- b. It denies that God is omniscient and affirms rather that he *learns* about future events by empirical means.
- c. Instead of sovereign God electing according to the counsel of his own will (Eph 1:11) and doing all his pleasure (Eph 1:5, 9), this position affirms that a reactionary God elects according to the will and pleasure of man.

C. The Biblical Material on Election

1. Biblical Terms for Election

- a. To Choose (*eklegomai*). Used of election to salvation seven times.

Mark 13:20—For the sake of the elect, whom he *chose*, he shortened the days.

John 15:16—You have not chosen me but I have *chosen* you.

John 15:19—I *chose* you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

Ephesians 1:4—He *chose* us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him.

See also James 1:18: “He chose to give us birth” (lit, “he birthed us according to his will”)

- b. Election (*ekloge*), used seven times in Scripture, is used exclusively of election to salvation.

Romans 9:11–12—God’s purpose in *election* might stand not by works but by him who calls.

1 Thessalonians 1:4—We know, brethren beloved by God, his *choice* of you.

2 Peter 1:10—Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and *election* sure.

- c. The Elect (*eklektos*). Used 17 times in Scripture of those who are objects of God’s election.

Romans 8:33—Who will bring a charge against God’s *elect*?

Colossians 3:12—...those who have been *chosen* of God.

2 Timothy 2:10—Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

- d. To Choose (*aireo*).

2 Thessalonians 2:13—God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

- e. To Ordain to Eternal Life (*tasso*)

Acts 13:48—As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

- f. To Predestine (*prooridzo*)

Romans 8:30—These whom he predestined, he also called; and these whom he called, he also justified; and these whom he justified, he also glorified.

Ephesians 1:5, 11

2. Other Biblical Expressions Reflecting Election

- a. Those foreknown/known (*proginosko*) by God

Romans 8:29—Those whom he *foreknew*, he also predestined...

1 Peter 1:2—Those who are chosen according to the *foreknowledge* of God.

- b. Those Given to Christ

John 6:37—All that the Father gives me will come to me.

John 17:2, 6, 9—Those whom you gave me out of the world.

c. The Lord's Sheep

John 10, 2, 3, 4, 11, 16

d. The "Many People" of Corinth

Acts 18:10— I have many people in this city.

D. The Framework of Divine Election

In order to understand the magnitude and necessity of divine election, we must discover the framework in which election occurs.

1. Human Depravity.

a. The Fact of Human Depravity

(1) Those who were "chosen in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4) were "dead in trespasses and sins" (2:1–3 cf. also 4:17–19).

(2) Those who are foreknown...predestined...elect (Rom 8:29, 33) uniformly turned the truth of God into a lie, assented to sin, and committed sin (1:18–3:20).

(3) We are chosen "out of the world" (John 15:16, 19).

b. The Extent of Human Depravity

"Because man is totally or pervasively corrupt, he is incapable of changing his character or of acting in a way that is distinct from his corruption."

—Robert Reymond, *New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 453.

John 6:44, 65—No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day... No one can come to me unless it has been granted him from the Father.

Question: John 12:32 indicates that God will draw all men to himself. Doesn't this destroy the doctrine of unconditional election? No. John 6:44 follows up he statement that those whom the Father draws he will also glorify. So if the "drawing" of John 6:44 and 12:32 are precisely the same, then we are of necessity universalists. Two alternatives arise for John 12:32:

- The "all men" of John 12:32 has reference to all kinds of men, giving explanation for the unprecedented inclusion of Greeks in Christ's ministerial sphere (12:20).
- The drawing here is simply the gospel offer, a *general* rather than a *special* call.

John 14:17—The world cannot receive [the Spirit of truth], because it does not see him or know him.

Romans 3:10–11—There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God.

Romans 8:7–8—The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

1 Corinthians 2:14—A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

c. Implications of Human Depravity for Election

(1) Election is of necessity *unconditional*. By this is meant that human beings cannot in any way meet any “conditions” that merit election by God.

- This is true from a *temporal* standpoint: Since God made his elective choice before the foundation of the world and according to his own pleasure, it is impossible for humans to influence this decision after the fact.
- This is true from a *volitional* standpoint: Since man is incapable of responding positively to God for salvation apart from the impartation of the Holy Spirit and the new nature, it follows that man cannot merit God’s elective choice.

Romans 9:11–12—Though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to his choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, “The older will serve the younger.”

Romans 9:16—It [election] not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

2 Timothy 1:9—God saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

Cf. also Ephesians 2:8–10; Titus 3:5.

(2) There can be *inequity* in God’s treatment of humans without there being any *injustice* on his part.

God’s condemnation of humankind is not an act of bare, arbitrary sovereignty. It is an act of divine justice, based on his holiness, and made necessary by God’s character that cannot look favorably upon sin (Rom 2:6; 2 Thess 16). The justice of God is *obligatory* in his nature, and compels him to treat all men equally by condemning them all. God’s elective choice is the product of his love, grace, and mercy, qualities which are voluntary in the nature of God. These qualities may be extended selectively without inviting the charge on

injustice. God treats all people justly, and by his mercy loves all people, but he does not love all people in the same way.

Justice: “The concern that each person receive that which is rightfully his or hers.”
—Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*

The modern idea of justice as “fairness” or “equitable treatment” should not be imposed upon the understanding of God as just. The idea of justice in Scripture is interchangeable with the idea of *righteousness*. To be just is to act in accordance with a standard of righteousness. God is always just. God is not always equitable.

Does this make God partial? No. Partiality is involved when one party has a claim to something and does not receive it. If God owed everyone a favor, then God would be partial or unjust to withhold from one person what he gives to another. Partiality is absent, however, when no one has any rights.

Romans 9:20–21—Does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

(3) There is no need for an election unto damnation.

Since by the sin of Adam fundamentally, and by his own sin as well man stands under God’s wrath, there is no need for a positive decree of “reprobation” (i.e., a decree to damn). The caricature of God as one who creates some people with the sole intent of damning them is a false one. As such, this syllabus rejects the idea of “double predestination.” Instead, this syllabus affirms *preterition*, or the passive withholding of God’s elective grace from those who stand already condemned. It contemplates man as *already fallen* and simply leaves him in that state. In election God overrules the fallenness of those objects of his electing love; in preterition God allows the non-elect to continue willingly on their self-determined path to eternal destruction. Election proceeds on the basis of God’s love, mercy, and grace; preterition proceeds on the basis of his justice alone.

John 3:18—Whoever does not believe stands condemned already.

Romans 11:7—What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were *hardened* (i.e., confirmed in the state they were already in).

Revelation 13:8; 17:8—Those who were not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life (not those who were written in the Lamb’s book of death).

2. The Grace of God

Grace is God’s condescending favor shown to justly condemned sinners; it is his decision to act toward people not on the basis of what they deserve, but upon the basis of his atoning love. His grace extends to guilty sinners who cannot merit it, cannot earn it, cannot repay it, and, in fact, do not even want it. God could have elected no one to salvation and punished all eternally for their sins and have remained holy and just. What moved him in eternity past to elect some to salvation is grace.

2 Timothy 1:9—God saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

Romans 11:5–6 (NKJV)—There is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.

A question is often raised, “Why doesn’t a loving God save everyone?” But a question worthy of greater contemplation is “Why does a just God save anyone?” The answer is the matchless grace of God.

3. The Love of God

God’s love is that which moves him to give of himself and of his gifts freely to personal beings. Election is the quintessential manifestation of the love of God. God’s love and his election are integrally linked in Scripture:

a. Israel’s National Election

Deuteronomy 7:6–8—The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, . . . but because the Lord loved you.

Deuteronomy 10:15—Yet on your fathers did the Lord set his affection to love them, and he chose their descendants after them.

Malachi 1:2–3—I have loved (chosen) Jacob; but I have hated (rejected) Esau.

b. The Believer’s Individual Election

1 Thessalonians 1:4—Knowing, brethren beloved by God, his choice of you.

2 Thessalonians 2:13—We always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.

In fact, to be *beloved* by God or *known* by God is synonymous with being *elect* by God.

Excursus: The Relationship of Love to Foreknowledge

As we have seen above, some argue that God’s election is conditioned on his prior knowledge of man’s free acts in time. But as we have also seen, foreknowledge is not properly discussed under the heading of God’s *knowledge*, but under the heading of God’s *love*.

- While foreknowledge sometimes means “knowledge in advance” (Acts 26:5; 2 Peter 3:17), election is never in view in these passages, and the object of foreknowledge is always impersonal: *facts* are known in advance. When the word foreknowledge is used with a *personal* object, the lexicons are agreed that the meaning of foreknow is “to choose beforehand” (BDAG, 866). It implies active love and not mere passive acknowledgement.

- This idea of elective foreknowledge is based on the common use of the term “know” in Scripture to convey the idea of special favor, affection, approval, and choice:

Amos 3:2—You only have I *known* of all the families of the earth.

Hosea 13:5—I *cared for* (lit., “knew”) you in the wilderness.

Matthew 7:23—Depart from me; I never *knew* you (clearly not a denial of God’s knowledge of their existence)

The common biblical euphemism of a man “knowing” a woman in a sexual setting (e.g., Gen 4:1) is also reflective of the understanding of “knowledge” as special favor and affection.

Note also the following:

- Even if we concede for sake of argument that foreknowledge is always God’s “knowledge in advance,” there is no indication that he received this knowledge discursively. In fact, Acts 2:23 places God’s foreknowledge in parallel with the “predetermined plan of God.” Furthermore, the idea of discursive knowledge with God seriously damages the claim to his omniscience.
- If God simply knew about believers’ conformity to the Son in advance (Rom 8:29), there would be no reason for him to predestine them to that conformity. Predestination becomes hollow and meaningless.

4. The Will of God

There are three reasons offered why God elected people to salvation:

- Because they are good.
- Because he saw they would believe.
- Because God purposed in his grace to save them.

The Bible clearly identifies the last as the correct reason.

a. Negatively

- (1) God’s election was not based on the will of man (Rom 9:16).
- (2) God’s election was not based on the works of man (Rom 9:11; 2 Tim 1:9).
- (3) God’s election was not based on the holiness of man (Eph 1:4).
- (4) God’s election was not based on the obedience of man (1 Peter 1:1–2).
- (5) God’s election was not based on the choice of man (John 15:16).

b. Positively

The ultimate basis for divine election is in God and not in man. It is his sovereign good pleasure based in his grace and love. Nothing in man could induce God to love him. Election is a product of God sovereign grace.

Ephesians 1:5—He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the kind intention of his will.

Ephesians 1:11—We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to his purpose who works all things after the counsel of his will.

Romans 9:11—God’s purpose according to his choice will stand, not because of works but because of him who calls.

2 Timothy 1:9—God saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace.

John 15:16—You have not chosen me but I have chosen you.

E. The Purposes of Divine Election

It is often falsely assumed that the salvation of souls is the end-all for the electing purposes of God and of the function of the church. However, it is clear that our omniscient God does not have as his purpose to save as many people as possible (else all would be saved). Scripture makes it very clear that the electing purposes of God are merely the means to a greater end.

1. The Glory of God

1 Peter 2:9—You are a chosen race... so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Romans 9:23— He did this [election] to make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory.

Ephesians 1:6, 12—He predestined us...to the praise of the glory of his grace; we have been predestined according to his purpose...that we would be to the praise of his glory.

2. The Holiness and Service of Believers

Ephesians 1:4—He chose us...that we would be holy and blameless before him.

Romans 8:29—He also predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son.

John 15:16—I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit.

1 Peter 1:2—...chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...to obey Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:10—We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

F. The Realm of Divine Election

Election is not a cold, abstract decree that is enforced by naked sovereignty. Such an idea cuts the nerve of evangelism and missions and leaves us with nothing by deterministic

fatalism. The application of God's electing decree always occurs within a realm, a sphere of human activity that cannot be neglected

2 Thessalonians 2:13—God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

1 Peter 1:2—...chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ.

The Spirit's ministry of regeneration always takes place in association with "the gospel," "the truth," and obedience of "the Word" (cf. also James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:22–23). Far from discouraging evangelism, this sphere of election should encourage us to present the truth of God's Word to the world, truth which the Spirit uses to "make people wise unto salvation." The great missionary movements of history have been successful not because believers thought that they could convince people of the gospel, but because believers knew that God would convince people of the gospel as believers presented it. So may it be in our own day.

IV. The Atonement: The Foundation for Salvation

A. Placing Atonement in the *Ordo Salutis* (Order of Salvation).

1. Atonement *Accomplished*.

The atoning life and death of Christ took place within history, and not before time began. Nonetheless, the Bible speaks of Christ's death, like election, as a certainty within the divine decree "before the foundation of the earth" (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:19–20; poss. Rev 13:8 [KJV]). In this sense we can regard the accomplishment of atonement as a certainty from eternity past.

A question often debated by theologians, however, is whether God's eternal decree to elect precedes or follows his eternal decree to atone for sin: Did God choose certain people and then send his Son to die for them *alone*, or did he send his Son to die indiscriminately for *all* mankind and then elect some of these to salvation?

It is suggested here that the most logical ordering is for God to elect and then to accomplish the atonement necessary to that salvation. As we shall see below under the "extent of the atonement," this conclusion accounts better for the biblical data.

2. Atonement *Applied*.

That God views atonement as a *certainty* in eternity past and as a *reality* on the cross does not mean that the elect are born free from condemnation. Atonement *accomplished* in the past must be *applied* within time. This occurs when Christ graciously unites a man to Christ as the fountainhead for all the salvific benefits the Christ secured on the cross. This will be further developed under the heading of "Union with Christ."

B. The Purpose of Atonement

1. Inadequate Theories of Atonement

- a. The **Ransom** view of atonement sees Christ's death as the payment of a ransom price to Satan to purchase back the souls of men that Satan "owns" as a result of the Fall. Specifically, God offers Satan a clever trade of his Son's life in exchange for the souls of men, a trade that Satan is eager to make. By a bit of trickery known only to God, however, Christ's perfections make his death impermanent (for a narrative expression of this event see C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*). This view suffers crippling features such as (1) inattention to divine justice, (2) a faulty view of Satan as equal in power with God, and (3) divine deception. To these we add that this view makes unnecessary and capricious all the vast biblical detail about atonement in both testaments.
- b. The **Christus Victor** view of atonement (see esp. Gustav Aulén), a view popular today in various "liberation" theologies common among repressed people groups, sees Christ's atonement as the decisive triumph of God over Satan and good over evil, a victory that gives us hope of triumph and relief both in this life and in the hereafter. While it is true that Christ's atoning work accomplishes ultimate victory over all varieties of evil, the *Christus Victor* approach (1) is much too optimistic about victory in the present age and (2) fails to capture the ethical basis necessary to the victory still to come.
- c. The **Moral Influence** view of atonement sets forth Jesus as the perfect model of conduct in life and death, a model that should *influence* us to live in a more godly manner. This is the standard liberal view, and one made popular in Charles Sheldon's book *In His Steps: Or, What Would Jesus Do?* This view (1) totally ignores all issues of divine justice and (2) renders the atonement an exercise in promoting moralistic therapeutic deism—usually (3) according to non-foundational standards of morality .
- d. The **Incarnational Solidarity** view of atonement is a postmodern updating of the Moral Influence View. It sees God as shifting from a punitive to an empathetic approach to reconciliation. By living, suffering, and dying among fallen people, God is able finally to understand them and to work effectively to help them. God's mission evolves (and with it the church's) from one of warning people about violent punishment for immoral people (an outdated, OT approach) to empathizing with and championing the cause of oppressed people. This approach is without doubt the leading view today among young Western Christians, and increasingly, among evangelical Christians. Major figures include Jürgen Moltmann and more recently Tony Jones. While this view correctly identifies Christ's atoning work as the eventual source of true justice, it (1) abandons biblical definitions of justice and (2) recasts justice according to non-foundational standards of morality, now, it seems (3) with an ironic antipathy toward Christianity, at least as it has been historically practiced.
- e. The **Governmental** view of atonement recognizes that human sin has extreme consequences in God's moral order—consequences that wreak havoc upon

society. God is able merely to forgive sin, but this would not help society. Instead, God ordered Christ to demonstrate for mankind the extreme results of sin in God's holy, moral order (hence the description *governmental*) and thus to convince man to reform himself. This is the standard Pelagian View and is held as well by many Arminians. Its primary error is in underestimating the extent of depravity: there is no need in this view for punitive satisfaction or substitution, because people are innately capable of reforming themselves.

- f. The ***Satisfaction (Only)*** view of atonement (Anselm) holds that Christ died to remedy the insult made by the kingdom of men against God their King. His death was not, however, personally substitutionary. Instead, Christ, by dying to satisfy God's wrath against sins he had not personally committed, received a vast amount of merit for which he had no need. As a result, Christ is now able to bestow merit as he wills upon those who please him. This is the majority Roman Catholic view today. This approach to atonement actually saves no one; instead, it accumulates the merit necessary to save as many as the church (the vicar of Christ) endorses.
2. The Biblical Idea of Atonement: The Substitutionary Removal of Guilt in Satisfaction of God's Penal Demands.

- a. Satisfaction

Romans 3:25–26—“God displayed [Christ] publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith. This was to *demonstrate his righteousness*,...so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God's perfect and absolute holiness sets up a perfect and absolute standard of right. This in turn demands perfect conformity (in motive, disposition, word, thought, deed, etc.) of all personal beings to that standard. Sin, being a violation of that standards, creates *guilt* that must justly be punished. God's holy demands are satisfied only by retribution and punishment. The expression of God's love is limited by the demands of his holiness.

Jesus' death was the penal satisfaction of God's wrath on the guilt of sin. This met the judicial and penal expectation for sin.

- b. Substitution

Isaiah 53 (entire chapter), esp. v. 6—“the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.”

2 Corinthians 5:21—“He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf.”

Galatians 3:13—“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.”

1 Peter 2:24—“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.”

1 Peter 3:18—“Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust.”

By *substitutionary* atonement is meant the death of Christ *in the place* of the sinner. It is sometimes called *vicarious* atonement. God demands that a sinner pay for his sin (Rom. 3:23); he demands satisfaction for sin. Jesus voluntarily became a substitute for individual sinners and suffered the punishment of sin in their stead.

3. The Nouns and Verbs of Atonement

a. *Guilt* is met with sacrificial *Expiation*.

Isaiah 53:10 (NIV)—“The Lord makes his life a guilt offering.”

Ephesians 5:2—“Christ...gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Hebrews 9:26—“He has appeared once for all...to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

Guilt is by definition liability to punishment. The punishment for offending God is life. Sin disqualifies a person morally from living (Rom 6:23—the wages of sin is death). The only other alternative to individual death of infinite duration is a perfect, sinless, vicarious sacrifice of life—Christ’s death on the cross.

Expiation is an OT idea detailed microcosmically in the Levitical sin offering. Just as an animal sacrifice could *purge* guilt (Deut 21:7–9), *purify* the offerer (Ps 51:7; Jer 18:23), *take away* iniquity (Isa 6:7), *remove* sin as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12), *casting it into the depths of the sea*” (Mic 7:19), *lift away* or *clear* guilt (Lev 10:17), and *blot out* transgressions (Isa 43:25) within the Israelite penal system, so also Christ’s sacrifice accomplished these same effects in those for whom he died (Heb. 9:23).

b. *Bondage* is met with *Redemption* or *Ransom*.

Matthew 20:28—The Son of Man...gave his life as a ransom for many.

Ephesians 1:7—“In him we have redemption through his blood.”

To **redeem** means to buy out of slavery by the payment of a ransom price; to release by payment that which has been lost. Apart from the payment of the life of Christ all men live in bondage:

- to the Law (OT) (Gal 3:10, 13; Gal 4:4–5).
- to sin (John 8:34; Gal 3:22; Titus 2:14; 3:3; 1 Pet 1:18).
- to an inability to do *any* good thing (Ps 14:1, 3; 53:1–3; Rom 3:12; 8:7–8)

c. *Wrath* is met with *Propitiation*.

Because God’s love is an essential attribute, it is difficult to think of God as a God of wrath who is righteously enraged by sin and who righteously despise the sinner because of his sin. But these are surely true:

Psalm 7:11 (KJV)—“The Lord is angry with the wicked every day.”

Psalm 11:5—“The Lord hates those who love violence.”

John 3:36—“The wrath of God abides on him.”

God’s **wrath** is not properly an attribute of God, but an extension of his holiness that makes him dispositionally opposed to sin and sinners. Note the following:

(1) The nature of sin produces wrath and demands satisfaction.

Romans 1:32—“Those who do such things deserve death.”

Hebrews 2:2—Every violation and disobedience receives its just punishment.

(2) God’s holiness produces judicial wrath and demands judicial satisfaction.

Exodus 34:7—“God does not leave the guilty unpunished.”

(3) Any sin against an infinite God is an infinite crime and demands the ultimate penalty—life. Since the life is “in the blood” a blood sacrifice was necessary.

Hebrews 9:14, 22, 23, 26—“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.... Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

Galatians 3:10, 13—Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

The theological term for the appeasement or satisfaction of God’s wrath is **propitiation**. Jesus took the just desserts of sin and placated God’s righteous anger, making love possible (1 John 4:10).

1 John 2:2—“He is the propitiation for our sins.”

d. *Enmity* and *Alienation* are met with *Reconciliation*

Sin produces **estrangement** and **hostility** between God and man:

Isaiah 59:2—Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.

Ephesians 2:12—“You were at that time separate from Christ, excluded... strangers... without God.”

Colossians 1:21—“You were formerly alienated and hostile.”

Reconciliation is the theological term for the removal of that hostility and the restoration of peace, harmony, and favor. Reconciliation affects both God (Matt. 5:23, 24) and man (Rom. 5:10).

Romans 5:10—“While we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son.”

2 Corinthians 5:18—“God reconciled us to himself through Christ.”

D. The Efficacy of the Atonement

What gives efficacy to the blood of Christ so that it can satisfy God's holy demands in the areas of guilt, bondage, wrath and enmity? In other words, what unifies and gives cohesion to the atonement? The answer is *obedience*. The substitutionary obedience of Christ is what enables His blood to cleanse from all sin (1 John 1:9). God reckons Christ's obedience to our account of disobedience.

1. Passive obedience

This is the name given by theologians for Christ's obedience in dying to meet God's legal requirement for sin. On the basis of this obedience, the penalties of the Law incurred by sinners are paid by Christ. By it the believer is forgiven and pardoned.

Philippians 2:8—He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

2. Active obedience

Pardon and forgiveness alone do not qualify anyone to go to heaven; mere release from punishment is insufficient. One who has been released from the penalty of the Law is not on the same plane as the one who has kept the Law. *Righteousness* is required to enter heaven and stand before God. Non-imputation of sin is insufficient; the imputation of merit is also necessary. On the basis of Christ's perfect obedience to his Father's will during his lifetime, the *merit* of Christ's obedience is credited to the believer so that he is accepted as righteous and restored to favor with God.

Romans 5:19—Through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Philippians 3:8–9—I must gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

E. The Extent of the Atonement

All honest, Bible-believing Christians recognize that some people will not be recipients of the salvific benefits of Christ's atonement and will and suffer eternal damnation. In this sense every one who denies universalism believes that the efficiency of the atonement is limited. The real question at issue is the *design* of the atonement. What did God intend for Christ's death to accomplish, and what, actually, did it accomplish?

Christ did not *actually* and *finally* atone for the sins of all men in the plain definition of the term, else the guilt of all men would be expiated, their debt paid, God's wrath satisfied, and their reconciliation effected. Since this is not the case, we must conclude that while Christ's death secured salvation for all kinds of people, without regard to historical expressions of discrimination or to creaturely distinctions (John 1:29; 12:32; Titus 2:11; 1 Tim 2:4; 1 John 2:2), and secured some general benefits for all men (e.g., common grace, the free offer of the gospel, etc.), his death actually redeemed only his elect (Matt 10:45; John 10: 11, 15, 26; John 17:9). In Paul's summary words, he is "the Savior of all men, especially of believers" (1 Tim 4:10).

V. Union with Christ

- A. Definition: The identification of an individual, during his or her lifetime, with the atoning work of Christ that functions as the fountainhead from which every spiritual blessing derives.

Ephesians 1:3—Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

1. Union with Christ has a *decretal* aspect by which identification of an individual with Christ is assured in eternity past (Eph 1:4–5).
2. Union with Christ has an *applicational* aspect by which identification of the individual with the atoning work of Christ is actually made in time.

B. Union with Christ in the *Ordo Salutis*

The instrumentality of the benefits of the atonement bestowed upon one of God's elect is the association of that person with the fountainhead of spiritual blessing, Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that union with Christ is placed here within the *ordo salutis*. All the benefits of salvation accrue to a person who has been united with Christ:

- Election is *in Christ* (Eph 1:4, 11; 2 Tim 1:9)
- Regeneration is *in Christ* (1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:4–5)
- Definitive Sanctification (death to sin) is *in Christ* (Rom 6:11)
- Freedom from the Law is *in Christ* (Romans 8:1–2)
- Progressive Sanctification is *in Christ* (Rom 6:1–23)
- Glorification is *in Christ* (Eph 1:18)

C. The *Duplex Beneficium* or Two-fold Benefit of Union with Christ.

It is important to guard against a mystical/pantheist understanding of union with Christ (e.g., the Eastern idea of theosis, whereby the believer is absorbed into the divine). At the same time, the texts above do suggest that the believer's association with Christ is more than a mere reclassification from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ." There is a change in the believer's disposition—every man in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Many of the Reformers dealt with this tension by proposing a *duplex beneficium* or twofold benefit of the believer's union with Christ:

- Justification is the legal benefit.
- Regeneration/Sanctification is the experiential benefit.

D. Union with Christ and Dispensationalism

Because the idea of union with Christ is sometimes closely associated with Spirit Baptism and the Church (e.g., 1 Cor 12:13), many dispensationalists deny union with Christ in the OT and relegate the concept to a much lower position on their *ordo salutis*. But note the following.

1. Just as OT believers' ignorance of the person of the Holy Spirit does not preclude Spirit indwelling, so also OT believers' ignorance of the person of Christ does not preclude their being united to him in some way. There are but two categories of people (1 Cor 15:22): those "in Adam" (the unregenerate) and those "in Christ" (the regenerate). There seems to be no alternative to these two categories, whether in this dispensation or any other. OT saints did not know about the person of Christ when they believed, but they still received Christ's imputed righteousness and identified unwittingly with him in the promises and sacrificial forms of the Mosaic economy and. We might add that sanctification is integrally tied to union with Christ (Rom 6–8), and unless we want to posit the absence of sanctification in the OT, there must have been some identification with Christ as the only valid source of righteous behavior in every dispensation.
2. While we may certainly say that union with Christ and Spirit baptism into the NT body of Christ are coterminous in the NT (1 Cor 12:13), this does not mean that they share identity. To speak of OT saints as being "in Christ" is not to say that they were part of the Church. While some instances of the phrase "in Christ" reference the NT believer's technical association with the Spirit-baptized body of Christ (Rom 12:5; Gal 3:28; 1 Thess 4:16), most speak of the believer's salvific identification with Christ's atoning work, an identification that occurs in every age.

VI. Effectual Call/Regeneration

- A. Definition: The gracious summons whereby God efficaciously ends an individual's resistance to God by imparting to him the new nature.
 1. There are some who differentiate the efficacious call from regeneration, placing the efficacious call *prior to* the exercise of faith and repentance and regeneration *after* the exercise of faith and repentance (e.g., Chafer, Walvoord, Demarest, Erickson). It is better to see these terms as synonymous (e.g., A. H. Strong, Piper) or better, that regeneration is the instrument by which God renders his general call efficacious (Hoekema, Reymond, cf. Murray). It is for this reason that this syllabus will treat them together.
 2. Another common way of looking at regeneration is to reduce it to the simple impartation of life. While regeneration certainly includes the impartation of life, it seems more complex than this: it also includes a new way of thinking, a new set of affections, and new volitional capabilities—elements, which regarded together, imply that the new *nature* is imparted in regeneration (See Strong, 809).
- B. Four Major Understandings of the Human Role in Coming to Christ for Salvation
 1. *Pelagianism*: Denies the fact of original sin and maintains that "their own native powers are such that men are capable of doing everything that God requires of them for salvation" (Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 468). Men achieve salvation apart from any necessary antecedent work of God.
 2. *Semi-Pelagianism*: Affirms original sin, but denies that this ultimately affects human ability to come to Christ. Man can begin his approach to God apart from any grace, though God must meet him halfway with cooperating grace.

3. *Arminianism*: Affirms original corruption and attendant, but posits the universal bequeathal of “prevenient grace,” by which God restores human ability to respond to God’s call. Grace makes an initial overture to man, but man must cooperate with God in order to achieve regeneration.
4. *Modified Calvinism*: Affirms original guilt, corruption, and inability and denies universal prevenient grace, but holds that humans respond in faith and repentance to God’s individual and efficacious summons in order to realize regeneration.
5. *Calvinism*: Affirms original guilt, corruption, and inability, denies universal prevenient grace, and holds that humans respond in faith and repentance to God’s individual and efficacious work of regeneration.

C. Aspects of the Divine Call

There are not technically two “calls” of God, but one. However, it is proper to speak of two aspects of that one call.

1. The General or “Gospel” Call

The general call to salvation is that by which God urgently invites *all who hear the gospel*, elect and non-elect alike, to come and be saved. The general call has the following characteristics:

- a. The general call is non-discriminatory.

Isaiah 45:22—Look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.

Matthew 11:28—Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

Acts 17:30—Now [God] commands all people everywhere to repent.

Revelation 22:17—And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

Cf. also the parables in Matthew 22:1–14; Luke 14:16–24.

Note on the General Call and General Revelation:

The general call to salvation and general revelation are not synonymous. General revelation is found in the human conscience and the created universe, and is truly universal. However, its function is purely non-salvific and condemnatory (Rom 1:18ff; 2:15–16). The general call is in the realm of salvation, and is non-discriminatory (i.e., it is available to both the elect and non-elect), but not truly universal—many in the world never hear the gospel message.

- b. The General Call may be resisted and rejected.

Isaiah 65:12—I called, but you did not answer.

Proverbs 1:24—I called and you refused.

Matthew 13:19—The evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

Matthew 24:14—For many are called, but few are chosen.

Matthew 23:37—How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

In fact, it is accurate to say that the general call is *always* resisted. It may engender curiosity and interest, and may be accompanied by a work of conviction that causes anguish or depression about one's condition. But the general call has no inherent enabling mechanism that can facilitate a favorable response. Regeneration is necessary to render God's call efficacious.

Question: Doesn't this make the call of God insincere?

The inability that keeps the unbeliever from responding to the general call of God is not a natural one but a moral one. That is, man has not lost his freedom of the will; instead, man is willfully non-compliant with the call of God. Thus we can say that God is sincere in his call and that man is culpable for his refusal of that call.

Ezekiel 18:23, 32—"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord God, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?... Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, repent and live." Cf. 33:11; also Matt 23:37; 2 Cor 5:20; 2 Pet 3:9.

See Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will*.

- c. Men are responsible for rejecting the general call.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9—[God will] deal out retribution to those who do not ... obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction.

Hebrews 12:25—See to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from him who warns from heaven.

2. The Efficacious Call

The efficacious call is so called because it accomplishes or "effects" a positive response to its call to salvation. It involves a direct, individual work of the Holy Spirit, in conjunction with the Gospel message, to lead the sinner out of darkness into light and to bring him to faith and repentance.

- a. Scriptural Support for the Efficacious Call

John 6:44—No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Note that this cannot be the general call to all people, because of the last phrase, “I will raise him up in the last day.” There is a necessary connection between the two phrases: everyone *called* in this context is also *raised up*. Unless one posits universalism, this must be a separate, individual, and efficacious call.

John 6:65—No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.

Romans 8:28—We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:30—These whom he predestined, he also called; and these whom he called, he also justified; and these whom he justified, he also glorified.

1 Corinthians 1:23–24—We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

2 Peter 1:10—Brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing you.

b. The Means of the Efficacious Call

(1) The Power of the Efficacious Call: Regeneration

1 Corinthians 2:14—A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are Spiritually appraised.

This verse teaches that the efficacy of the gospel message hinges on the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. v. 16: the mind of Christ) in the individual. The natural (unregenerate) man cannot welcome or properly evaluate the gospel message because he does not have the new mental and volitional capacities imparted by the Holy Spirit via regeneration.

Some suggest, based on passages that picture human activity (faith, repentance, receiving the Word, etc.) as leading to life (John 1:12; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Pet 1:22–23), that the efficacious call is simply an “intensive and effectual working by the Holy Spirit,” one that “is in many ways similar to the prevenient grace of which Arminians speak” (Erickson, 944–45). This non-regenerative activity of the Holy Spirit leads a person to conversion and only then to regeneration. However, this theory results in a dubious double conferral the new nature: new life, mind, will, and emotions are both given *twice* (see esp. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 122, 128). This theory also conflicts with other passages which regard faith and repentance the result of new life (John 1:13; 1 John 5:1; Titus 3:5–7).

See below under regeneration for an explanation of the problem of life following belief.

(2) The Instrument of the Efficacious Call: The Word of God

The efficacious call does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, this work of the Holy Spirit always occurs in the context of the gospel message.

1 Corinthians 1:18—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.

1 Thessalonians 1:5—Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit.

2 Thessalonians 2:14—He called you through our gospel.

c. The Reason for the Efficacious Call: God's Purposes

2 Timothy 1:9—God has...called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace.

We are brought again back to election. God's works of election and calling are coextensive (Rom 8:30; 2 Thess 2:13–14).

d. The Efficacious Call and Human Freedom

The effectual call of God does not violate human freedom (i.e., the spontaneity of the will). God's call is not a constraint or coercion of man's will, but the means by which God secures man's voluntary consent. How God is wholly sovereign and man is truly free is a profound mystery, but it would be heretical to deny either.

Psalms 110:3—Your people will volunteer freely in the day of your power.

Philippians 2:13—God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

John 6:45—Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to me.

Acts 16:14—The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

Note that this is not an affirmation of absolute or *contra-causal* freedom. Man is not free to choose contrary to his nature. Freedom is self-determination, the ability to make determinations apart from external compulsions. God alone is wholly free, that is, he is not bound in any sense by any force external to himself (Job 23:13; Dan 4:35, etc.). But while his freedom is pure (no one can "override" God), even he is not *absolutely* free or *contra-causally* free: he is restricted by his own self-imposed limitations (Titus 1:2). Animals are free that they can freely follow programmed instincts. Man is free in that he can make free choices within the confines of his own nature and environment. However, since unregenerate man is by nature hostile toward God and incapable of pleasing him, it becomes absolutely essential for his *nature* to change in order for conversion to occur: regeneration.

e. The Immutability of the Efficacious Call: It Is Irrevocable.

John 6:44—No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Romans 8:30—These whom he predestined, he also called; and these whom he called, he also justified; and these whom he justified, he also glorified.

Romans 11:29—The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

1 Thessalonians 5:24—Faithful is he who calls you, and he also will bring it to pass.

D. Regeneration

1. Biblical terms for regeneration.

a. The actual noun *regeneration* (*palingenesis*) appears in a salvific context only once in the NT:

Titus 3:5—He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration.

b. Other terms for regeneration include the following (incomplete):

1 Peter 1:3—God has *caused us to be born again* to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

John 1:13—...who were *born*, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but *of God* (see also John 3:8).

1 John 5:2—Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been *born of God*.

2 Corinthians 5:17—If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creature*; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Ezekiel 36:26—I will give you a *new heart* and put a *new spirit* within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a *heart of flesh* (cf. Matt 5:8's *pure in heart*).

Deuteronomy 29:4—The Lord has not given you *a heart to know*, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear (cf. Matt 13:15).

Deuteronomy 30:6—The Lord your God will *circumcise your heart* and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live (cf. Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4).

Acts 16:14—The Lord *opened her heart* to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

2. The Definition of Regeneration

The basic meaning of regeneration is the idea of *new life* given to someone who is dead. Since “life” always occurs as part of a larger concept, namely, one’s nature, however, this syllabus prefers the following definition: **Regeneration is the instantaneous, unanticipated, and supernatural impartation of the new nature.**

3. A Delineation of the Definition

a. Regeneration is Instantaneous.

Conception and life are not *processes* but *events*. It is utterly foolish to speak of a partially pregnant woman or a partially dead person, because there is a sharp line of demarcation between those who are alive and those who are not alive. So it is with regeneration. People cannot be nurtured gradually into a regenerate state; it is instantaneous.

(Note the expressions in the texts listed above.)

b. Regeneration is Unanticipated.

Life can be anticipated only by the giver of life. Spiritual life cannot be coerced, produced unilaterally, made more likely, or generated by any human action.

John 3:8—The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

John 1:13—Those who believe in his name... were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Question 1: If humans cannot render salvation any more likely to occur, what impetus is there for evangelism?

While regeneration cannot be produced by human effort, regeneration always takes place in the context of the communication of God's Word.

James 1:18—In the exercise of his will he brought us forth by the word of truth.

1 Peter 1:23—You have been born again... through the living and enduring word of God

While a Christian witness cannot *produce* life, it can generate the context of the Word of God which the Spirit effectively uses to make unbelievers "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim 3:15). The nature of regeneration in no way lessens our responsibility to evangelize the lost, but it does free us from (1) the false idea that we must develop a slick "technique" to generate more conversions (note 1 Cor 1–2), and also (2) the weight of false guilt when God is not pleased to save people through our faithful witness.

Question 2: If regeneration is instantaneous, how do we account for people who seem interested or "open" to the gospel, but who ultimately turn away?

When the Bible speaks of *death* among humans, it always speaks of separation and never annihilation. Death is always *with respect to something*. So the fact that people think and talk about spiritual things does not preclude the fact that they are dead with respect to a salvific relationship to God. An unbeliever can even recognize the existence of God, be acutely aware of sin, and realize that judgment awaits him, yet be devoid of any desire or willingness to respond to this knowledge. Such a person is still devoid of all life and lacking in regeneration despite his curiosity about God.

c. Regeneration is Supernatural.

Regeneration is a unilateral work of God that precludes all human synergism. Man is the passive recipient of spiritual life as surely as a human embryo is the passive recipient of physical life.

John 1:12–13—But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Titus 3:5—He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.

d. Regeneration imparts a New Nature.

Note that the context of regeneration is *depravity*. Since an unbeliever is incapable of acting contrary to his sinful nature (cf. Jer 13:23), it is necessary for a person to receive a new nature in order for his mind, will, and emotions to make a proper response to God. This new nature becomes immediately evident in that the first conscious response of a regenerate person is the exercise of the new capacities of his mind, will, and emotion.

(1) A new mind

Jeremiah 24:7—I will give them a heart to *know* me, that I am the Lord (cf. also Matt 13:15).

(2) A new set of emotions

Deuteronomy 30:6—The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to *love* the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

(3) A new will (including the immediate exercise of faith)

Ezekiel 11:19–20—I will put a new spirit within them, and I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may *walk* in my statutes and *keep* my ordinances and do them.

Ezekiel 36:26–27—I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...and cause you to *walk* in my statutes, and you will be careful to *observe* my ordinances.

Zephaniah 3:9—I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may *call* on the name of the Lord.

1 John 5:1—Whoever *believes* (present tense) that Jesus is the Christ has been born (perfect tense) of God.

Question 1: What about passages that speak of repentance unto life (Acts 11:18) or belief resulting in life (John 3:16; 20:31)?

The concept of *life* in Scripture is a broad one, and the idea of “having life” is not synonymous with “being regenerated.” Instead, *life* often has reference to abundant life, resurrection life, or, as Paul puts it, “life that is truly life” (1 Tim 3:19). As such, eternal life can be said to *follow* justification (Titus 3:7), sanctification (Rom 6:22), a lifetime of perseverance (Rom 2:7; Jude 21), and even regeneration itself (Deut 30:6). It is not possible to equate *life* in these contexts with the inception of spiritual life, i.e., regeneration.

Question 2: If regeneration precedes faith, then what do I tell a person he must do to have eternal life?

From a human perspective, the first activity of an awakened mind is to repent and believe. It is silly to tell a person to “be regenerated,” because he cannot produce this work; however, it is quite appropriate for us to plead with people to do works commensurate with a regenerate mind. Thus, it is perfectly acceptable to say with the Scripture writers, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”

VII. Definitive Sanctification (see esp. John Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” *Works* 2:277–84)

- A. Definition: Definitive Sanctification is the instantaneous act whereby an individual is set apart to God and makes a decisive breach with his slavery to and liability to penalty for sin.

Excursus: The Idea of Sanctification

To *sanctify* simply means “to set apart.” We normally think of sanctification as the post-conversion *process* of setting apart, and, in fact, the majority of biblical references to sanctification are of this progressive variety (i.e., we are *being* sanctified). However, there are other passages which speak of sanctification as a completed event (see esp. 1 Cor 6:11) which renders us “saints.” It is this idea that will be discussed in this section.

- B. The Biblical Data

Romans 6:2–7, 14, 18—How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.... Sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.... Having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Romans 7:4–6—You were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for

death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

- 1 Peter 2:24—He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

D. Misunderstandings About Definitive Sanctification

1. The Dispensational Change View

Many dispensationalists see Romans 6 and 7 as describing a shift in God’s dispensational program, from law to grace, that releases everyone in the current dispensation from the obligations and penalties of the Mosaic Law. However, Romans 6–7 seems instead to be describing the passage of the unregenerate in any dispensation out of the sphere of law, judgment, and death into the sphere of grace, blessing, and new life enjoyed by the regenerate. What is being described is not unique to our current dispensation, but is common to individual salvation in any age.

2. “Positional” Sanctification

Some suggest that definitive sanctification be reduced to “positional” sanctification, a non-experiential divine regard of the regenerate as part of a “set-apart classification” (Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:244). Positional sanctification, which can scarcely be distinguished from justification, is a forensic, judicial classification in which a “moral change in the thing sanctified is not demanded” (3:244). This position essentially denies definitive sanctification as a category. There are two major problems with this view:

- a. The passages above clearly indicate that definitive sanctification is experiential: it involves *death to sin*. Something actually happens to believers in regeneration that annuls total depravity and releases him from bondage to sin. True believers are in an actual sense set apart from sin and set apart to God. Chafer’s understanding pictures the old and new natures in a seesaw battle for dominance that can be as easily lost as won. No real damage is incurred by the old nature, and no advantage is given the new nature.
- b. This denial of the experiential nature of definitive sanctification leaves the believer with no native mechanism for the conquest of sin. The power of sin remains unabated and there is no necessary repentance or change in the life and conduct of the believer. Instead, the believer must experience a second work of grace (consecration, dedication, filling) to experience the “victorious Christian life.”

3. Perfectionism

Quakers, Wesleyans and other Holiness groups suggest that death to sin basic to definitive sanctification implies the possibility of sinlessness in this life (see esp. Matt 5:48; 1 John 3:6–9). But John clearly indicates earlier in his epistle that the believer *does* sin, and in fact, that to think otherwise is self-deception (1:8). Definitive

sanctification clearly does not release us from susceptibility to sin and our continuing need to “mortify” sinful impulses (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5).

4. The Sinfulness of the Physical Body View (for an excellent response to this view see William Combs, “Does the Believer Have One Nature of Two?” *DBSJ* 3 [1997]: 81–103).

Another view, taught by John MacArthur, teaches that, even though our sin nature has been destroyed, sin still persists in the single aspect of humanity that escapes redemption: the “flesh.” Sin lingers in the synaptic patterns of the brain and the ingrained habits of the human body, from which we can never be liberated until death. While this theory answers the question how Christians can sin if they are “dead to sin,” it also has several problems:

- a. It smacks of a Platonic idea of a dichotomy between material and immaterial, between body and spirit, the former in both cases being evil and the latter good.
- b. It misunderstands the meaning of *flesh* in the NT. The term *flesh* in all of the Scripture passages critical to this discussion (e.g., Gal 5:16–17) are not references to the physical aspect of humanity, but, as the NIV consistently translates the term in these instances, “the sin nature.” The necessary connection of sin to the physical body is a fallacious one.
- c. It ignores the fact that some of the sins that continue to harass the Christian are in no way physical in nature (e.g., covetousness, idolatry, blasphemy in Colossians 3), and mastery over sins like these is tied to the renewal of the *mind* (Rom 12:2).

C. The Biblical Understanding of Definitive Sanctification

The “new creation” generated in regeneration is attended by a corresponding death of the “old man” (Eph 4:20–24; Col 3:9–10). This “old man,” properly defined as “what we were ‘in Adam’—the man of the old age, who lives under the tyranny of sin and death” (Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 218–19), is crucified, dead, and gone. We have in its place the “new man,” not a perfect man (as the perfectionists and John MacArthur suggest), but a *sanctified* man who lives under the control of the Spirit and who is thus enabled to struggle with and progressively eradicate the old nature (see esp. Rom. 7:14–25).

VIII. Conversion

Conversion is an umbrella term that subsumes repentance, faith, and confession in its scope. It is the initial expression of the conscious life of the regenerated sinner whereby he decisively turns from sin and toward God for the expiation and forgiveness of sin.

Acts 3:19—Repent and *return*, so that your sins may be wiped away.

Acts 3:26—God raised up his Servant and sent him to bless you by *turning* every one of you from your wicked ways.

Acts 14:15—You should turn from these vain things to a living God.

Acts 26:18—I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may *turn from darkness to*

light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me.

1 Thessalonians 1:9—You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.

Isaiah 55:7—Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Note: To reduce conversion to a mental exercise is to strip away all of its substance and benefit. Conversion and benefits of conversion are real, not simply states of the mind.

Question: If confession and forgiveness occur at salvation, why do we encourage believers to make confession of sins and seek forgiveness of sin?

Confession, the act of *admitting, conceding, or claiming* something, is properly a condition of salvation (Romans 10:9–10, e.g., demands the confession of Christ’s sovereign lordship as necessary to salvation). However, confession of sin, that is, admitting and conceding error, is properly the activity of believers (1 John 1:9), and its neglect actually betrays spiritual pride.

More difficult is the idea of forgiveness, which can stand in Scripture as the once-for-all expiation of sin (e.g., 1 John 2:12). One might argue that once God’s full and final forgiveness has been secured, no additional forgiveness could possibly be available, and to seek it would be to deny the sufficiency of Christ’s death. Scripture’s clear statements that forgiveness is available for believers who sin after salvation (Ps 25:18; Matt 6:12; 1 John 1:9), however, militates against this idea. It is proper, instead, to see *forgiveness* in these contexts as something less than the absolution of sin’s eternal penalties. Instead, *forgiveness* should be viewed in these contexts as a release from one or more of the temporal consequences of sin which can and do still accrue to true believers (e.g., 1 Cor 11:30–32).

A. Repentance

1. Definition

a. Repentance is not...

- (1) Reformation. Repentance is more than trying harder, turning over a new leaf, or making a new resolution to behave in a better way.
- (2) Contrition. Repentance *involves* sorrow for sin, but one can be sorry for sin without repenting.

Exodus 9:27—Pharaoh admitted he had sinned.

Num 22:34—Balaam admitted he had sinned.

Matthew 27:4—Judas admitted he had sinned.

Luke 18:23—The rich young ruler was “very sad, for he was extremely rich.”

Hebrews 12:17—Esau found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears [sorrow].

2 Corinthians 7:10—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.

- (3) A Mere Change of Opinion. Again, repentance involves a change of mind, but this is not a fleeting thing. It involves a change of *disposition*.
- (4) Penance. Penance is a rite practiced by the Roman Catholic Church in which works are assigned as the meritorious ground of pardon. Penance, however, is not restricted to the Roman Church, however, being unofficially practiced by many others who are theologically uninformed.

- b. Repentance is a change of mind and disposition about God, Christ, and sin.

Shedd notes that repentance involves the dispositions, will, or inclination (2:534).

Erickson concurs, describing repentance as “godly sorrow for one’s sin together with a resolution to turn from it” (937).

While repentance includes matters of mental judgment, true repentance also always includes a change of attitudes and inclinations, and with these an intent to change behavior.

There is an element within evangelical Christianity which desires to eliminate repentance from conversion, seeking merely “belief” to the exclusion of repentance. Others seek to reduce repentance to a mere change of mind to the facts of the gospel. This approach does, of course, make for more “decisions” for Christ, but creates few true believers. That which keeps people from heaven is not a mere “lack of belief.” It is also their refusal to repent and change their *behavior* (Ps 7:12; Ezek 18:32; Matt 11:20; Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:20; 2 Pet 3:19; Rev 2:2, 16). All true *believers* are also *repenters*.

2. The Biblical Data

- a. Negatively

Isaiah 55:7—Let the wicked *forsake* his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts...

Ezekiel 33:11—“As I live,” declares the Lord God, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways!”

Job 42:6—I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

Revelation 9:21—They did not repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

b. Positively

Isaiah 55:7—...let him return to the Lord, and he will have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Joel 2:12–13—Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.

Acts 20:21—They should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

3. Elements of Repentance

a. There is an *intellectual* aspect.

This includes a recognition and acknowledgement of the heinousness of sin on the one hand, and the recognition and acknowledgment of God's sovereign lordship on the other.

Psalm 51: 3—I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.

Romans 10:13—You must “confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord.’”

b. There is an *emotional* aspect.

While mere sorrow does not guarantee repentance (as we noted above, many are selfishly sorrowful), true repentance always involves sorrow, i.e., genuine shame for the odiousness of sins committed and genuine regret for offending a holy God.

Job 42:5–6—My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

2 Corinthians 7:10—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.

c. There is a *volitional* aspect.

True repentance involves the determination to abandon disobedience and to surrender to the lordship of Christ. Repentance does not *consist of* good works, but inevitably *issues in* good works.

Matthew 3:8—Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Acts 26:20—They should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

4. The Origin of Repentance

Repentance, like faith, is properly a human activity. However, the source of this activity is ultimately God. Natural man has no native capacity to exercise repentance.

Zechariah 12:10—I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

Acts 5:31—He is the one whom God exalted to his right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 11:18—When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”

2 Timothy 2:24–25—...if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.

Note Mark 10:17–27 (Luke 18:18–27) and God’s *difficult* plan of salvation.

B. Saving Faith

1. The Definition of Saving Faith

Saving faith is the knowledge of, assent to, and unreserved trust in the completed work of Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures (see Warfield, “On Faith in Its Psychological Aspects,” 402–3).

2. The Elements of Saving Faith

a. There is an intellectual aspect: knowledge, the *apprehension* of truth.

Faith has a cognitive aspect that is grounded in the apprehension of truth. Faith cannot operate in a vacuum; it must be settled upon objective knowledge. The modern concept of faith as antithetical to knowledge is a scurrilous one, and amounts at best to salvation by sincerity and at worst to salvation by ignorance. Faith is grounded first of all in the facts of the gospel message.

Romans 10:14, 17—How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?...

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

What are the essential facts of the gospel essential to salvation?

- God exists as the sovereign of the universe (Heb 11:6)
- Christ is Savior and Lord (John 1:12; 3:18; Rom 10:9, 13).
- The Scripture testimony is true (Luke 24:25; 1 Thess 2:13; 1 John 5:10).
- Jesus is God (John 8:24; 14:11; 20:31; 1 John 5:1, 4)
- God sent Christ and raised him from the dead (John 11:42; 16:27; Rom 10:9; 1 Thess 4:14).

- b. There is an affectual aspect: inclination, assent, and *affirmation* of truth.

The apprehension of truth is essential to salvation, but never in isolation from assent (see, e.g., John 3:2; Acts 26:27; Jas 2:19 for those with apprehension of truth without assent to truth). The truth apprehended by the mind must be welcomed as truth and as applicable to the need of the individual. To profess something as true yet simultaneously exempt oneself from that truth is to deny its truth. This is not faith.

Hebrews 11:1—Faith is *assurance* of things hoped for.

The legion passages in Scripture that list a person as the object of faith are also proof of the aspect of *assent* in saving faith. Ordinarily, belief has to have a propositional object (e.g., “I believe *that* water boils at 212° F” or “I believe *that* the sky is blue,” etc.). By reducing the object of faith to a single person or other object (e.g., “I believe God” or “I believe the Bible”) the speaker assents to the sovereignty or authority of the thing believed.

- c. There is a volitional aspect: trust, the *appropriation* of truth.

Faith not only acknowledges truth and affirms truth, it also acts upon truth. This goes beyond the mere statement of words to activity. ***The litmus test for faith is always obedience.***

Romans 10:10—With the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness.

John 1:12—As many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name (the word “receive” here carries the idea of welcoming, a fact readily affirmed in the context).

John 4:14—Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst (imbibing implies participation).

John 6:37—The one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out (coming implies participation; cf. also v. 53).

Matthew 11:28–30—Take my yoke upon you (implies active submission).

Hebrews 5:9—He became to all those who obey him the source of eternal salvation.

Note that disobedience and disbelief are set as synonyms in the NT (esp. John 3:36; Heb 3:18–19); likewise, obedience and faith are synonyms (Acts 6:7; Rom 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; 11:23; **15:18**; 2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 4:17). A “faith” that never issues in obedience is not true faith.

3. The Object of Saving Faith

One’s faith is no stronger than its object. The prayer of faith is only as efficient as the faithworthiness of its content. A person who cannot express in his own words the content of his faith has not exercised faith.

a. Faith affirms in the veracity of God's Word.

1 Thessalonians 2:13—We also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

1 John 5:10—The one who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son.

b. Faith affirms the historical facts concerning Jesus the Christ

John 20:30–31—Many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.

1 Thessalonians 4:14—We believe that Jesus died and rose again.

1 Corinthians 15:1–4—Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

c. Faith affirms the person, capabilities, and sovereignty of Christ.

Acts 16:31—Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

4. The Origin of Saving Faith

Men routinely exercise faith in light switches, chairs, staircases, etc. But it is not correct to think of saving faith as a simple transfer of routine reliance from mundane objects to the person of Christ. There are fundamental differences between routine faith and saving faith.

a. Saving faith does not originate from sense experience.

Matthew 16:17—Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:7—We walk by faith, not by sight.

Even the great miracles of Christ, designed to affirm his person and message, cannot compel faith. They may compel acknowledgement, but not true faith (Luke 16:30–31; Acts 2:13; 8:13–24; 14:13).

b. Saving faith does not originate in historical investigation.

Matthew 18:11–15—Faced with historical facts, the enemies of the cross circulated an ingenious theory about the historical data.

Acts 26:26—Agrippa knew the facts of Christ’s ministry, but was unmoved by them.

The “quest for the historical Jesus” and biblical archaeology generate no converts.

- c. Saving faith does not originate in human reason.

1 Corinthians 1:21—The world through its wisdom did not come to know God.

1 Corinthians 2:4–5—My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

- d. Saving faith is ultimately the gift of God.

Faith is not a matter of a human transfer of fiduciary objects. Faith is imparted to man by the Holy Spirit of God by the act of regeneration, where man’s will is made capable of a free and voluntary response to the gospel message.

Acts 14:27—God...opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 2:5—Faith is sourced in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 12:3—No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 2:8—By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Philippians 1:29—To you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake.

Philippians 2:13—It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Hebrews 12:2—Christ is the “author...of our faith.”

IX. Justification

- A. Definition: Justification is God’s acceptance of the believer whereby he declares him righteous and treats him as such, based wholly on the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Clarification: Justification does not mean to *make* righteous; only to acknowledge or regard as righteous in a forensic sense. Note the following:

Luke 7:29—When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God’s justice [lit. “they justified God”].

Proverbs 17:15—“He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord.” [Who could possibly object to making the wicked righteous?]

Roman Catholicism teaches that justification is the infusion of grace, a *subjective process* by which a person becomes progressively more righteous. The positional element is

almost entirely lost, and justification becomes hopelessly confused with progressive sanctification. The Roman Catholic is thus obsessed with *accumulating* righteousness in order to complete his justification and merit heaven. Those with a surplus of merit (e.g., Christ and Mary) can transfer some of that surplus to those who are wanting, but eternal security is ultimately elusive, because sufficient grace might never be earned and the whole process might be derailed at any time by the commission of “mortal sins.” The seed problem with Roman Catholic soteriology, however, is its failure to understand justification.

Two critical theological elements to emphasize when evangelizing Catholics are:

1. Justification is not a *process* but an *event* (Rom 5:1, 9; 1 Cor 16:11), and further, a *permanent* event (Rom 8:1, 30) that excuses us from God’s wrath (Gal 3:13–14; Col 1:22).
2. Justification not *experiential* but *judicial* (Rom 5:18; 8:33). It has to do with God’s view of a person’s relationship to the divine moral law (via the removal of guilt and liability to punishment) and not a person’s condition/conduct. The “experience” connected with justification is strictly in the peace with God that ensues.

B. The Basis of Justification

1. The Great Problem:

Job 9:2—How can a man be righteous before God?

The real question here, of course, is how a *sinful* man may be accounted righteous by a *holy* God. Note the tension here:

- a. Man is thoroughly sinful (Rom 3:21–23) and radically *unrighteous*. It is one thing to justify (i.e., declare righteous) a righteous man, but it is immoral and dishonest to justify (i.e., declare righteous) an *unrighteous* man (Prov 17:15).
- b. God is holy and righteous (Hab 1:13) and his moral law completely forbids him to suspend his righteousness to justify the ungodly (Rom 2:12–13).

2. The Solution

- a. Negatively, justification is not based on...

(1) Man’s Character

Psalm 130:3—If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

Psalm 143:2—In your sight no man living is righteous.

Ecclesiastes 7:20—There is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

(2) Man’s Works.

Romans 3:20—By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in his sight.

Romans 4:5—But to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Galatians 3:11–12—Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.”

(3) Religious Ritual

Romans 4:9–11—Righteousness is not credited on the basis of circumcision.

- b. Positively, justification is based on the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ to the sinner’s account. Christ perfectly satisfied the divine moral law by his active and passive obedience, then imputed these vicariously to us.

- (1) Christ’s passive obedience (in Hoekema’s terms, his “suffering obedience”) is his obedience in yielding up his life in death as a satisfaction for sin. On the basis of this obedience, the penalties of the Law incurred by the individual are paid by Christ. By it the believer is *forgiven* and *pardoned*.

Galatians 3:13—Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.

Romans 5:9—Having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him.

Pardon and forgiveness operate in the realm of *guilt* or liability to punishment. These are not (as might be inferred from the contemporary use of “pardon” in our legal context) declarations of innocence or even mere absolution from guilt. They involve the actual *satisfaction* of the liabilities and penalties of guilt by Christ’s death.

The Roman Catholic understanding of remission of sin is really just the displacement of guilt by the infusion of grace. Pardon is a consequence of human merit rather than a propitiatory act accomplished in full at Christ’s death. In Romanism there really is no satisfaction of justice and guilt is more or less ignored rather than resolved by an ethical atonement.

- (2) Christ’s active obedience (or in Hoekema’s words, his “law-keeping obedience”) is his complete fulfillment of all the positive demands of God’s moral law. By imputing these to us, Christ credited to us his own meritorious righteousness, restored us to favor with Christ, and gave us peace with God.

Romans 5:18–19—So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

2 Corinthians 5:21—He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Romans 5:1—Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

Pardon and forgiveness alone do not qualify anyone to go to heaven. Mere acquittal is insufficient. One who has been released from the penalty of the Law is not on the same plane as the one who has perfectly kept the Law. Not having guilt is not the same thing as having righteousness. The satisfaction of imputed sin is insufficient; the imputation of merit is also necessary. On the basis of Christ's perfect obedience to his Father's will during his lifetime, the *merit* of Christ's obedience is credited to the believer so that he is accepted as righteous and approved by God.

X. Adoption

Adoption has typically found scant treatment in the theologies, and many give the concept no separate treatment at all. Some carelessly equate adoption with regeneration; because of its legal connotations, others view adoption as one of the many benefits of justification. It is probably best to pair justification with adoption (just as we paired regeneration with definitive sanctification and faith with repentance) as separate forensic events with distinctive results for the believer. Justification secures our *righteousness*; adoption secures our *sonship/heirship*.

A. Definition: Adoption is the judicial placement of the believer into God's family as a son and heir to all God's benefits and provisions.

1. The term adoption (*uiothesia*) is used five times in Scripture

Ephesians 1:5— He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.

Galatians 4:4–5—God sent his Son...to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

See also Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4.

2. The idea of being a “son” or “child” of God in Scripture is a broad one with several meanings, but it frequently carries with it the idea of adoption.

John 1:12—As many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God.

Galatians 3:26—You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Note: Some suggest that the term “child” (*teknon*) denotes a life relationship and references the standing of the believer in view of regeneration, while the term “son” (*uios*) denotes a legal relationship and references the standing of the believer in view of justification. This distinction, however, seems artificial. John seems to have a preference for the phrase “children of God” in describing believers, reserving “Son of God” for Jesus Christ, while Paul uses the terms interchangeably (see esp. Rom 8). This choice of vocabulary does not seem to be a theological but a stylistic decision: the distinction between children of God and sons of God seems quite forced.

The idea of sonship is very complex. Note the following understandings:

- There is a sonship by natural creation (Acts 17:25–29—all humanity are God’s offspring)
- There is biological sonship.
- There is a sonship of essence/substance (John 5:17–18; 10:33, 36; 19:7). Christ is the *monogenes* son.
- There is a sonship of adoption. God has no physical children; his children are all by adoption.

B. The Nature of Adoption

1. Adoption is declarative and legal.

As with justification, adoption does not change a person’s character or disposition; instead, it gives him a new standing before God and a new relationship with God.

2. Adoption originates in God’s sovereignty.

Ephesians 1:5—He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the kind intention of his will.

3. Adoption is secured by the death of Christ.

Galatians 4:4–5—God sent forth his Son...so that he might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

4. The rights of adoption are conferred on the regenerate only.

John 1:12–13—As many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God...who were born...of God.

Note: Regeneration causes us to be “born” from above, but this event is experiential and not judicial (i.e., we receive a new nature with all of its attendant thoughts, intentions, and desires). We are not technically “born into” God’s family, though; instead, we are adopted legally into his family in direct consequence of our spiritual birth. Regeneration and adoption are inseparable, but they are not identical.

5. The rights of adoption are received by faith.

John 1:12–13—But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name.

Galatians 3:26—You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

6. The purpose of adoption is God’s glory.

Ephesians 1:5–6—He predestined us to adoption as sons...to the praise of the glory of his grace.

C. The Benefits of Adoption

1. The Fatherhood of God

Note that the “universal fatherhood” of God (Acts 17:25–29; Heb 12:9; Jas 1:18) that exists because God is the source, support and end of all things is not in view here. While all men are related to God as their Creator, all are not related to him as their “Re-Creator.”

Note the play on meaning in John 8:42ff: They said to him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on my own initiative, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the devil.

Matthew 6:8–9—Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray, then, in this way: “Our Father who is in heaven...”

Matthew 7:11—If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask him?

2 Thessalonians 2:16—Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

Note also the epistolary introductions in Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon.

2. An Inheritance

Galatians 4:7—Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Romans 8:17–23—...if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

3. Release from Previous Relationships

Romans 8:15—For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”

4. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Causing Us to Recognize Our New Standing.

Romans 8:15–16

Galatians 4:6

5. The Right to Eternal Life (see note on p. 25 above for a discussion of *life*)

Titus 3:7—Being justified by his grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

D. Evidences of Adoption

1. Obedience

Romans 8:14—For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

2. Chastening

Hebrews 12:6–8—For those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

3. Separation

2 Corinthians 6:14–18—“Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord, “and do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me.”

XI. Progressive Sanctification

A. Definition:

1. Negatively.

a. Sanctification is not asceticism and legalistic self-denial.

While sanctification clearly involves the denial of sinful impulses (Rom 8:13; 1 Cor 9:27; Col 3:5) and can even legitimately include the development of extrabiblical rules to protect weaker brothers (1 Cor 8:13) or even oneself from personal temptation (Matt 23:2, 23). However, it is important to note that the essence of sanctification is not having “higher” standards than the next person. All too often this approach to sanctification betrays legalism (the attempt to earn salvific merit) or Pharisaism (a form of spiritual pride that uses adherence to an artificial legal code as a means of garnering superior status, influence, or esteem).

b. Sanctification is not “letting go and letting God.”

Again, while yielding to the authority of God and his Word are essential to sanctification, the essence of sanctification is not the passive attainment of a new spiritual plateau. Note the following expressions of this idea:

- Wesleyanism posits the possibility of “entire sanctification,” where the believer becomes free from known sin so that he no longer must struggle with sin.
- Modified Wesleyanism and some charismatic groups posits a “second

blessing” that can lift the believer to a higher plane of holiness.

- Keswick theology posits the graduation of the believer from a “carnal state” to a “spiritual state,” variously called the “victorious” or “deeper Christian life” (a state of spiritual equilibrium where the new nature perfectly counteracts the old nature). This state is achieved initially by a crisis event of “dedication,” “consecration,” “brokenness,” or “absolute surrender,” then periodically renewed by means of Spirit-filling.

All these variations betray a desire for a “quick and exciting” approach to sanctification that bypasses the slow, hard, and methodical work of mortifying the lusts, habits, and besetting sin that continues with painstakingly slow progress throughout life. Other ominous results of this theological aberration include:

- Easy-believism: Faith is simply “belief,” not commitment. Worry about consecration later—the “nonlordship salvation” position.
 - Antinomianism: Personal holiness doesn’t count for anything—I’m saved and that’s all that matters.
 - Denial of Perseverance: You can have the first work of grace without experiencing the second, and thus need not grow.
 - A general excuse for sin in the lives of professing believers.
2. Positively, progressive sanctification is the advancement of the believer in his spiritual life negatively by putting to death the deeds of the sinful nature and positively by growing in Christian graces.

Assumptions within this definition:

- a. Although the work of definitive sanctification renders the old man (what we were in Adam) dead and produces a “new creation” whose governing impulse is holy, there remain sinful tendencies within man that must be subdued—the *old nature*.

Romans 6:10–14—Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

- b. The existence of these two opposing tendencies gives rise to a conflict that persists through life.

Galatians 5:17—For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

Romans 7:15–25—For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not

practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

- c. The process of sanctification is forwarded when the believer, enabled by the Holy Spirit and through increasing faith, progressively conquers and gradually extirpates the power of the old nature.

Romans 8:13—If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

1 Corinthians 9:27—I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Colossians 3:5—Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.

For an excellent treatment of this topic see William Combs, “Does the Believer Have One Nature of Two?” *DBSJ* 3 [1997]: 81–103).

B. The Means of Sanctification

1. Humility

A biblical view of sanctification recognizes that man, even regenerate man, is not innately capable of sanctifying himself. He needs the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

John 15:5—He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Note: Although spiritual life is tied to the believer’s union with Christ, and there is a real sense in which all the members of the Godhead indwell believers (John 14:23), it is clear that the work of God in sanctification is attributed primarily to the Spirit (see 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2), and the work of the other members of the Godhead in sanctification are mediated through the Spirit’s indwelling work.

Romans 8:9–10; 12–13—You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not

belong to him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit is alive because of righteousness.... So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

2 Corinthians 3:18—But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

The filling passages (esp. Eph. 5:18) intimate that the believer is not to be arrogant and self-serving, but should humbly defer his natural will to the Holy Spirit's voice in the new nature.

Note: Many (usually, but not exclusively, Keswick) theologians develop the idea of “the filling of the Holy Spirit” into a highly conditioned *event* or series of *events* that the believer is to seek for. These events occur after a series of “conditions” for Spirit filling are met. This idea has a storied history and is maintained by many good men. However, it is probably best to view “filling” as the believer's everyday suppression of his sinful will so that he may exercise his regenerate will under the influence of the Holy Spirit. “Filling” is not an elusive event that is experienced on rare occasions after a battery of stipulations has been met; it is the common experience of believers living in humble obedience to the Spirit's directives found in the Word of God.

2. Active Obedience

- a. Obedience implies a standard of obedience to be mastered and followed: the Word of God.

John 17:17—Sanctify them by your truth; your Word is truth.

- (1) The Word identifies sin.

James 1:23–25—The Word of God is a mirror that reveals flaws and deficiencies.

- (2) The Word cleanses from sin.

Ephesians 5:25–27—Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

- (3) The Word, through the medium of the Spirit, transforms the believer into the image of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18—But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

- b. In direct contrast to the Keswick idea of “stillness,” Scripture describes the process of sanctification as one of aggressive activity on the believer’s part. This in no way minimizes the Spirit’s role as the Sanctifier; it simply reveals the sanctification process to be a mutual effort of the regenerated believer and the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:13—If you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are *putting to death* the deeds of the body, you will live.

2 Corinthians 7:1—Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Ephesians 2:10—We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good *works*, which God prepared beforehand so that we would *walk* in them.

Philippians 2:12–13—*Work out* your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Philippians 3:13–14—One thing I do forgetting what lies behind and *reaching forward* to what lies ahead, I *press* on toward the goal.

Colossians 3:5—*Put to death*, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.

1 Thessalonians 4:3—For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that you *abstain* from sexual immorality.

Titus 2:11–14—The grace of God...instructs us to *deny* ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,...*zealous* for good *deeds*.

3. Change

A biblical understanding recognizes that perfection will not be realized in this life (1 Thess 5:23; Rom 7:24–25 cf. 8:23; 1 John 1:8), but this does not result in a pessimistic outlook on the Christian life. The Christian life is one of gradual but inexorable growth in Christlikeness. The Christian is in a state of continual *change*.

Romans 6

Romans 8:29—For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become *conformed* to the image of his Son.

2 Corinthians 3:18—But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being *transformed* into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Romans 12:2—Be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind.

XII. Preservation and Perseverance of the Believer

Introduction: The certainty of the believer’s final salvation may be looked at in two ways. From

God's perspective, God guarantees the final salvation of all true believers by a continuous operation of his grace. This is known as *preservation* or *eternal security*. From man's perspective, the believer must and will continue in faith, sound doctrine, and good works until the day of final redemption. This is known as *perseverance*. Note the following theological positions:

- Roman Catholics deny both preservation and perseverance entirely. Salvation is always tentative, and can be lost at any time due to the commission of mortal sins.
- Wesleyan Arminians deny absolute preservation and perseverance. They maintain that perseverance *must* occur in order to secure final salvation, but deny that it necessarily *will* occur. Salvation may be lost due to willful sin or apostasy. This position consistently preserves their concept of the absolutely free human will—if a person can freely choose God, he can likewise “unchoose” him.
- Antinomian Arminians affirm preservation but deny perseverance. Salvation can never be lost by one who professes faith in Christ, but continuance in the faith is unnecessary. They inconsistently maintain an absolutely free human will in choosing God, but deny that a person, having once chosen God, can ever renege on that choice.
- Calvinists affirm both preservation and perseverance as necessary counterparts. God preserves all genuine believers, but preserves them by means of a perseverance that *must* and *will* manifest itself in a Spirit-led life of continued faith, sound doctrine, and good works.

This syllabus maintains that preservation and perseverance necessarily exist mutually, i.e., God's preserving grace inevitably (though not automatically) causes us to persevere.

Jude 21, 24—Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.... [He] is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy.

A. Preservation (Eternal Security)

1. Definition: God's guarantee of the final salvation of all true believers by a continuous operation of his grace.

1 Peter 1:5—Those chosen and born again are “protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

- a. Preservation deals only with those who are truly saved, not just professing Christians.
- b. By God's preserving work believers are kept in a state of ultimate security, but not in a condition of perfect obedience. Preservation does not deny the possibility of temporary backsliding.
- c. Preservation is wholly the work of God's grace and not human effort; however, believers are kept through faith, not irrespective of faith.
- d. Preservation is permanent, extending to the “last time.”

2. The Biblical Basis for Preservation

John 6:39—This is the will of him who sent me, that of all that he has given me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day (cf. v.37—“I will not cast out”).

John 10:27–30—My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Romans 8:31–39—Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “For your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 11:29—The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

1 Corinthians 1:8–9—Our Lord Jesus Christ...will also confirm you to the end.

Ephesians 4:30—By [the Holy Spirit] you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Philippians 1:6—He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24—Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he who calls you, and he also will bring it to pass.

Hebrews 7:25—He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Jude 1, 24–25—...those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.... He is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy.

3. Other Doctrines of Scripture that Support Preservation/Eternal Security

a. The Attributes of God and Preservation

(1) The Faithfulness of God

1 Thessalonians 5:24—Faithful is he who calls you, and he also will bring it to pass.

(2) The Omnipotence of God

1 Peter 1:5—Believers are “protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

b. The Providence of God and Preservation

Romans 8:28–30—We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom he predestined, he also called; and these whom he called, he also justified; and these whom he justified, he also glorified.

c. The Work of Christ and Preservation

(1) The Substitutionary Atonement of Christ

Since Christ has fully expiated sin and fully satisfied God’s wrath on the behalf of all true believers, this guarantees that believers will never face the penalty for sin.

John 5:24—He who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Romans 8:33–34—Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is he who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

(2) The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

John 14:19—Because I live you shall live also.

Romans 5:8–10—While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Romans 6:5— For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection

1 Peter 1:3–5—God...has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God through faith.

(3) The Intercession of Jesus Christ

Hebrews 7:25—He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

d. The Presence of the Holy Spirit and Preservation

Ephesians 4:30—By [the Holy Spirit] you were sealed for the day of redemption.

e. Other Facets of Soteriology and Preservation

(1) Election and Predestination

John 6:37, 39—All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out. . . . This is the will of him who sent me, that of all that he has given me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

Romans 8:29–30—For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom he predestined, he also called; and these whom he called, he also justified; and these whom he justified, he also glorified.

(2) Definitive Sanctification

Hebrews 10:14—By one offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Romans 6:3–4—All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death. Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Note: The very terms *death* and *eternal* life carry ultimate implications.

(3) Union with Christ.

Romans 8:1—There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

4. Problem Passages

a. Passages warning against false professions

Hebrews 2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:8; 10:26–39; 12:14–29

2 Peter 2:20–22

1 Corinthians 9:27

These passages and other like them warn professing believers that failure to persevere in faith, sound doctrine, and good works are indication that true conversion never really occurred. These passages do not warn not against loss of salvation, but against self-deception among professing believers who never had salvation in the first place.

b. Passages that speak of a sin leading to death

1 John 5:16

Matthew 12:32

While there are sins that can confirm a person in unbelief (apostasy, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit), they can be committed only by unbelievers.

c. Passages that deal with assurance rather than security.

The book of 1 John is filled with tests of genuine faith that all believers fail on occasion. What is lost here is not *salvation*, but the assurance of salvation. Consistent failure here should, however, cause a person to examine himself whether he truly is in the faith (see below).

5. The Practical Value of Preservation

Eternal security eliminates fear and despair, gives joy and relief to the believing heart, and also transforms fear-induced dutiful obedience into enjoyable service for God.

1 Corinthians 15:58—Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

B. Perseverance

1. Definition

a. Negatively

- (1) Perseverance does not mean that sanctification is *automatic*. That it is *inevitable* cannot be denied (see below); however, perseverance requires effort, self-examination, active faithfulness, and obedience.
- (2) Perseverance does not mean that a believer can never sin or even that he cannot sin grievously. Instead, in the words of the Westminster Confession, a true believer “can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace.”
- (3) Perseverance does not even mean that a believer cannot die with or as a result of unconfessed sins (e.g., 1 Cor 11:30–32). However, it does mean that a true believer cannot intentionally deny the essential doctrines of the faith or develop a pattern of life totally out of keeping with the faith.
- (4) Perseverance does not mean that people *claiming* to be believers cannot apostasize totally (1 Tim 1:19–20; 2 Tim 4:10; 2 Pet 2:1–2).
- (5) Perseverance does not mean that believers must by their own efforts alone do the work necessary to retain their salvation. It is God’s grace working through the faith and life of the believer that causes him to persevere.

b. Positively

Perseverance means that all true believers will and must continue in faith, sound doctrine, and good works, and can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace.

2. The Biblical Basis for Perseverance

a. Direct Statements

Philippians 1:6—He who began *a good work in you* will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (implies that preservation occurs by means of a persevering life).

1 Peter 1:5—You who are protected by the power of God *through faith*.

Hebrews 12:14–15—Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God.

b. Statements that failure to persevere reveals false faith

Matthew 24:12–13—The love of the many shall become cold. But he that endures to the end shall be saved (also Mark 13:13; Luke 21:19).

John 8:31—If you continue in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine.

John 15:5–10—He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit.... If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.... If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.

1 Corinthians 9:27—I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 15:1–2—You are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

Philippians 2:12–16—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...so that you will prove yourselves to be...children of God...holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

Colossians 1:22–23—He has now reconciled you in his fleshly body through death, in order to present you before him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard.

2 Timothy 2:12—If we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us.

Hebrews 3:6, 14—We are Christ's house if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.... We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.

Hebrews 10:36, 39—You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.... My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Note: The warning sections in Hebrews are designed to alert professing Christians that a salvation “experience” that does not endure, but that reverts to a false religion or to a pagan lifestyle is not true conversion. Such a professing Christian is self-deceived.

James 2:17—Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

1 John 5:13—These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

The “Tests of Life” that comprise the totality of 1 John are all acts of perseverance. We know that we have been born of God if we do righteousness (2:3, 29); love other believers (2:10; 4:7); maintain an active church life (2:19); maintain orthodox theology (4:15); and continue in our faith in Christ (5:1, 4). Likewise, we know that we have *not* been born of God if we fail to practice the truth (1:6); fail to confess sin (1:8–9); sin wantonly (2:3–4; 3:4–10); love the world (2:15–17); hate other believers (2:9, 11; 4:8, 20), and fail to preserve orthodox theology (2:22)

Jude 21—Keep yourselves in the love of God.

Note: Wesleyan-type Arminianism suggests that these passages demonstrate that a believer can *lose* his salvation. The testimony of the passages listed above under preservation, however, clearly preclude this understanding. Antinomian-type Arminianism and Keswick Theology suggest that these passages show that a believer can remain only a lower-tier, carnal Christian, can fail to attain or maintain discipleship status, and can consequently lose his reward. But note the following: (1) Several of the passages above use terms that simply cannot refer to “upper-tier” Christians, but to salvation itself (having eternal life in 1 John; seeing the Lord in Heb 12; being saved in Matt 24); (2) The understanding of two-tier Christianity is a grave distortion of Scripture (see esp. “The Disjunction Between Justification and Sanctification in Contemporary Evangelical Theology,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 6 [2001]: 17–44; Ernest Reisinger, *What Should We Think of the Carnal Christian?* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1978]).

3. Aspects of Perseverance

a. Perseverance in Personal Faith

1 John 5:1, 4—Whoever believes [pre. tense implying continuous action] that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.... For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

This means that a true believer will never apostatize or lose his faith and trust in God for salvation through Jesus Christ. Lack of perseverance shows lack of life. Continuance is the evidence of reality.

The question may be asked how far we can take this. In the early church, for instance, there was debate stemming from these verses whether the church should reinstate believers who denied their faith under the duress of persecution. It is probably best to say that such a person is guilty of *dishonesty*, but not actual *apostasy*. True apostasy is intentional and permanent.

b. Perseverance in Sound Doctrine

John 8:31—If you continue in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine.

1 Corinthians 15:1–2—You are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

Colossians 1:22–23—He has now reconciled you...if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard.

Again, the question may be asked how much doctrine someone may be wrong about and still be a Christian. In response, it should be noted that a believer may be in error due to limited understanding or lack of teaching, however, he will not deny the clear teachings of Scripture once exposed to them, and will not repudiate the central message of the Gospel. He will never “deny” the faith.

c. Perseverance in Good Works

Philippians 2:12–16—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...so that you will prove yourselves to be...children of God

James 2:17—Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

The “Tests of Faith” in 1 John

Again, of how much disobedience can a believer be guilty before he despairs of spiritual life? The answer is not quantifiable. 1 John clearly teaches that believers do sin (in fact, 1 John 1:8–10 teaches that to deny this is evidence that one is *not* a believer); it also teaches, however, that continuance in sustained, willful, and unconfessed sin for which God fails to chasten the believer is impossible for a believer. God will invariably chasten sin in true believers, even to the point of death (1 Cor 11:30), and this chastening unto death is itself a mark of true perseverance. It is virtually impossible, however, to reach a definite verdict of regenerate/unregenerate on this factor alone, even in oneself. A true believer, though, will not allow himself to live so close to this precipice of uncertainty.

XIII. Assurance

A. Definition

Assurance is the believer's personal knowledge and certainty of being in a state of grace and of his final destiny in heaven.

B. The Ground of Assurance

The *ground* of assurance is the promises of God's work of preservation/eternal security. These promises guarantee the possibility of the assurance of salvation in true believers. However, these promises contain in them no inherent means of determining whether those promises apply to *me*. That is, they tell a person that if he truly is a Christian he is secure, but do not tell him if he truly is a Christian.

C. The Means of Assurance

1. A Persevering Expression of Faith

John 5:24— Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Colossians 1:23—He has now reconciled you...if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard.

1 John 5:1, 13—Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.... These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Note that these passages are not concerned with whether one *has believed*, but whether one *believes*. It recognizes the possibility of a profession of faith that is proved false by a failure to continue in the faith or bear the necessary fruits of faith.

A small but vociferous group of scholars that have organized into the Grace Evangelical Society contend that self-deception about one's participation in the gospel is essentially impossible (contra passages like John 2:23–25; 1 John 2:19). So long as one has expressed faith at some point in his past that God will save him, he is saved, regardless of his continuation in the faith, commitment to the lordship of Christ, changes in behavior, and other fruits of faith. For members of the Grace Evangelical Society, requiring fruits of faith as evidence of salvation is tantamount to works salvation. In response to this unusual understanding, note that (1) this understanding has a faulty view of faith (see material above on faith/repentance); (2) this understanding erroneously confuses works *for the purpose of* salvation and works *as a result of* salvation—it confuses the means to salvation with the means to the assurance of salvation; and (3) this understanding clearly stands against the plain teaching of Scripture.

2. Perseverance in Good Works

This means stands as the overwhelmingly dominant means in Scripture whereby one “examines himself whether he be in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5; 2 Peter 1:3).

2 Peter 1:5–10—Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.

1 John 1:7–8— If we say that we have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 2:3–6—By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know him,” and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in him: the one who says he abides in him ought himself to walk in the same manner as he walked.

1 John 2:9–11— The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness.

1 John 2:15—If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:19—If they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

1 John 2:28–29—Abide in him, so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of him.

1 John 3:9–10—No one who is born of God practices sin, because his seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 3:14—We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

1 John 3:18–19—Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We

will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before him.

1 John 3:24—The one who keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in him. We know by this that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

1 John 4:8—The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 5:13—These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Two Caveats: First, good works are not of themselves proof of salvation. Matthew 7:21–23 describes works that issue forth from something other than faith. Perseverance must be coupled with the ministry of the Holy Spirit (see below) for a complete realization of assurance. Second, since no Christian is perfectly consistent in maintaining good works, it is neither surprising nor unhealthy for a Christian to occasionally lack assurance (1 Cor 9:27; Heb 10:35; 2 Pet 1:9). In fact, this seems to be a God-ordained means to ensure Christian obedience and faithfulness.

3. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Romans 8:14–17—For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

1 John 4:13—By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

This should not be construed to mean that God’s Spirit makes private, propositional revelations to the believer concerning his spiritual status. Instead, God’s Spirit manifests himself by fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23), spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7), progressive sanctification (Rom 8:13–14), skillful application of God’s Word (1 Cor 2:14; 1 John 2:20), and a genuine delight in the things of God (Rom 15:13).

XIV. Glorification

A. Definition

The final consummation of salvation wherein the believer is freed from the presence of sin and receives fullness of adoption and resurrection life.

B. Delineation

Glorification is not precisely the blessed state into which all believers enter upon death (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23). Though this event is a magnificent one, it cannot be compared to that day when “this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality,” and the Scripture will be fulfilled as “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54). Emphasis here is on the eschatological restoration of the whole created order to what it was intended to be (Rom 8:19–23).