

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 1: PROLEGOMENA

The Glory of Salvation

Lesson 1

Soteriology

The Crown Jewel of Theology

Why the Doctrine of Salvation Is the Most Glorious Subject in All of Theology

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Key Texts: Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:1–10; Romans 3:21–26; 8:28–30; Titus 3:4–7

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Ephesians 2:8–9, NASB 1995

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Introduction

There is a sense in which every doctrine in the whole of systematic theology has been, from the very beginning, reaching toward this one. Theology Proper reveals the character of the God who saves. Christology unveils the Savior through whom salvation comes. Pneumatology describes the Spirit by whose sovereign power it is applied. Anthropology and Hamartiology lay bare the depth of the ruin from which sinners must be rescued. Angelology traces the supernatural arena in which the drama of redemption unfolds. Bibliology establishes the only sufficient authority by which all of this can be known. And now, standing at the center of it all, the doctrine toward which every preceding locus has been pointing, and from which every subsequent locus will draw its light, we come to Soteriology: the doctrine of salvation.

The word itself is drawn from two Greek roots: *sōtēria*, meaning salvation or deliverance, and *logos*, meaning word, study, or reasoned account. Soteriology, then, is the theological discipline that investigates the full scope of what God has done to rescue sinners from the ruin of the fall and to bring them into everlasting fellowship with Himself. It is the study not merely of what God has offered but of what He has actually accomplished, actually applied, and actually secured, for real sinners, in real time, on the basis of the real atoning work of a real Redeemer. There is no doctrine in Christian theology more personally urgent, more pastorally rich, or more doxologically explosive than this one.

And yet it must be said plainly at the outset: Soteriology is not primarily a study about us. It is a study about God. The great error of much popular Christianity is to place the sinner at the center of the salvation narrative and to treat God as the supporting actor in what is fundamentally a human drama. But the Scripture will not permit this. From the eternal election of the Father before the foundation of the world, to the accomplished redemption of the Son at Golgotha, to the regenerating work of the Spirit in the heart of the sinner, to the final glorification of the redeemed at the consummation of all things, salvation is, from first to last, a Trinitarian achievement. The sinner contributes nothing to its procurement, adds nothing to its sufficiency, and can subtract nothing from its certainty. It is, as Paul declares in Ephesians 2:8–9, entirely a gift of God, given by grace, received through faith, designed to exclude all boasting and to ensure that every ounce of the glory goes to the Giver alone.

This is why the Reformers rightly identified the doctrine of salvation as the material principle of the Reformation and the article by which the church stands or falls. When Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517, the question at issue was not merely ecclesiastical corruption or procedural reform. It was the very nature of the gospel itself: how can a just God justify sinners? By what means does a guilty person stand before the holy God not under condemnation but declared righteous? The answer the medieval church had given, grace infused through the sacraments, working together with human cooperation and meritorious obedience, purified further in purgatory, and supplemented by the treasury of merit, was not merely insufficient. It was, in Luther's burning conviction, a corruption of the gospel so radical that the gospel itself had been lost. The Reformation was, at its heart, a soteriological revolution: the recovery of the truth that sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

This series of thirty-five lessons will trace the whole of the doctrine of salvation with theological rigor, biblical fidelity, and pastoral warmth. We will begin, in this first unit, by establishing the prolegomena: why Soteriology is the crown jewel of all theology, how the church has understood salvation across the centuries, and what the logical order of God's saving work looks like when traced through Scripture with care. We will then move through

each dimension of the *ordo salutis*, from the eternal decree of election, through the covenant of redemption, union with Christ, effectual calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, assurance, and glorification, until we stand at last before the unbroken golden chain of Romans 8:29–30 and marvel that the God who foreknew is also the God who glorified.

It must also be said that this series is offered not as an academic exercise but as a pastoral necessity. Every person who has ever genuinely believed the gospel carries within them, whether they can articulate it or not, some understanding of these great realities. The doctrine of Soteriology is the theological scaffolding that gives that experience its proper shape, its proper content, and its proper glory. The believer who studies these doctrines carefully will find, again and again, that what they are learning is not merely new information about God but a richer account of the grace they have already received, and that richer account will, if received in faith, produce not intellectual pride but the deepest, most undeniable, most abandoned worship of which the human soul is capable.

The governing conviction of every lesson in this series can be stated simply: salvation is entirely the work of the triune God, accomplished in history by the Son, applied sovereignly by the Spirit, on the basis of the eternal purpose of the Father, and received through the gift of faith, all to the praise of the glory of His grace. This is the doctrine the Reformers recovered, the Puritans expounded, and the saints of every century have found to be the inexhaustible well from which the thirsty soul drinks and is never left empty. May the Spirit who applies the very salvation we are about to study also open our minds to understand it, our hearts to treasure it, and our lips to proclaim it with clarity and joy.

No study of Soteriology is truly complete, however, without an acknowledgment of its deeply personal stakes. These are not doctrines that can be handled with the clinical detachment of a laboratory technician who examines specimens from behind protective glass. They are doctrines about you, about your guilt, your helplessness, your rescue, your standing before God, and your destiny. The student who picks up this study merely as an intellectual exercise will miss the most important thing the Spirit intends these truths to produce: the broken, grateful, wonder-filled heart of a soul that has seen both the depth of what it deserved and the height of what it has received. Soteriology, rightly received, does not make a person theologically arrogant; it makes them theologically astonished. And that astonishment, sustained and deepened over thirty-five lessons, is worship.

I. Soteriology Defined

The Study of Salvation Through the Lens of Scripture and Redemptive History

A. What Soteriology Investigates

Soteriology, from the Greek *sōtēria* (salvation) and *logos* (word, study), is the branch of systematic theology that investigates the full scope of God's saving work in behalf of fallen sinners. This encompasses the entire range of what Scripture teaches concerning the divine rescue of ruined humanity: the eternal election of the Father before the foundation of the world, the covenant of redemption within the Godhead, the accomplishment of redemption through the incarnation, obedience, death, and resurrection of the Son, the application of that redemption by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit through regeneration and effectual calling, the reception of salvation by grace through faith, the ongoing work of sanctification, the perseverance of the elect through every trial, and the final consummation of all saving work in the glorification of the redeemed.

The Greek word *sōtēria* carries the root meaning of rescue, deliverance, or preservation from destruction. In the New Testament, it is used to describe both the present experience of those who are being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18) and the final, eschatological reality that awaits the people of God at the return of Christ (Romans 13:11; 1 Peter 1:5). It is a word that pulsates with urgency, for the ruin from which it speaks of rescue is not a marginal inconvenience but a catastrophe of cosmic proportions: the total corruption of human nature, the weight of divine wrath, the dominion of spiritual death, and the certainty of eternal condemnation for all who remain outside of Christ.

What unifies all of the distinct doctrines within Soteriology is their common source, their common ground, and their common terminus. Their common source is the sovereign grace of the triune God, who alone initiates and accomplishes every aspect of the saving work. Their common ground is the person and work of Jesus Christ, without whose atoning sacrifice and resurrection none of the benefits of salvation could be procured or applied. And their common terminus is the glory of God alone, the everlasting display of the wisdom, holiness, justice, love, and grace of the God from whom and through whom and to whom are all things (Romans 11:36).

This Trinitarian architecture of salvation has decisive implications for how we study it. The Father plans (Ephesians 1:4–5), the Son accomplishes (Hebrews 9:12), and the Spirit applies (Titus 3:5), and none of these three acts can be understood rightly apart from the others. To preach a Christ who accomplished redemption without a Spirit who applies it is to offer a theoretical salvation that never reaches the sinner. To speak of the Spirit's work without grounding it in the accomplished work of the Son is to present an inner transformation disconnected from its only sufficient objective basis. Soteriology, rightly understood, is a resolutely Trinitarian discipline, and every lesson in this series will be conducted within that Trinitarian framework.

It is also worth observing at the outset that Soteriology is the doctrine in which every other theological discipline finds its most practical and personal application. The doctrine of God becomes most urgently relevant when we ask how sinners can stand before a holy God. Christology descends from the heights of divine glory into the pressing reality of a human soul in need of a Savior. The doctrine of the Spirit ceases to be abstract when we consider that it is He who must make the dead alive before they can respond to the gospel. Every locus of

systematic theology that has preceded this one was, in a sense, preparation for this moment, the moment when doctrine meets the soul's deepest need and the answer is found to be not a system but a Savior.

B. *The Crown Jewel Among Doctrines*

If Theology Proper is the queen of the theological sciences, revealing the infinite perfections of the God who is, then Soteriology is the jewel that rests most brilliantly in her crown. There is no doctrine more central to the glory of God as revealed in Scripture, more essential to the hope of the human soul, or more comprehensive in its reach across the whole of the biblical narrative than the doctrine of salvation. It is the subject upon which the whole of redemptive history turns, anticipated in the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15, developed through the covenantal unfolding of Abraham, Moses, and David, consummated in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and applied through the Spirit-filled mission of the church until the final trumpet sounds.

John Calvin understood this with characteristic precision. In his Institutes, he insists that the proper knowledge of God is inseparable from a proper knowledge of ourselves in our need, and that the meeting point of both is found in Christ, through whom God both reveals Himself most fully and rescues the creature most completely. It is no accident that the third book of the Institutes, by far the longest, is devoted entirely to the application of the grace of Christ to the believing soul. For Calvin, the doctrine of salvation is not merely one important locus among many; it is the heart of the matter, the point at which theology and life, Scripture and experience, the eternal decree and the temporal moment of faith, come together in the most profound and urgent way.

The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 1:3–14, erupts almost immediately into the most compressed and comprehensive account of God's saving purpose to be found anywhere in the New Testament. Within the span of a single sustained doxological sentence in the Greek, he traces the believer's salvation from its origin in the Father's election before the foundation of the world, through its accomplishment in the redemption and forgiveness secured by the blood of Christ, to its present application in the sealing of the Spirit, and forward to its eschatological goal in the praise of the glory of God's grace. The whole of Soteriology in miniature, pulsating with a doxological energy that the careful student of this doctrine will find growing stronger, not weaker, the more carefully and completely the full teaching of Scripture is received.

It is for this reason that we designate Soteriology the crown jewel of systematic theology, not because the other doctrines are less true or less important, but because it is here that all the other doctrines discover their highest purpose. The doctrine of God discloses the holiness that makes salvation necessary and the love that makes it possible. The doctrine of Christ reveals the Mediator through whom it is accomplished. The doctrine of the Spirit traces its sovereign application. Every locus in the theological system finds its fullest significance when understood in relation to the saving purpose of the triune God that Soteriology traces.

There is also a doxological weight to this designation that goes beyond mere systematic priority. When the Scripture wants to produce worship, it reaches for the language of salvation. When Paul wants to move the Ephesian church to adoration, he does not begin with the doctrine of creation or even with the perfections of the divine nature in themselves; he begins with the electing, redeeming, sealing grace of God directed toward a specific people for their salvation and God's glory. When the redeemed in Revelation 5 break into song before the throne of the Lamb, the subject of their song is not God's omnipotence in the abstract but His redeeming work in the particular: "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God

with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9, NASB 1995). Soteriology is the crown jewel not only of theology but of eternity’s worship.

II. The Two Great Questions

The Theological Problems Soteriology Is Designed to Answer

A. How Can a Just God Justify Sinners?

The first great question that drives the whole discipline of Soteriology is the one Paul articulates with crystalline precision in Romans 3:26: how can God be both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”? This is not a peripheral problem. It is the central dilemma of the entire human predicament before God, the problem that the entirety of the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed toward but could not ultimately resolve, and the problem whose answer is the very content of the gospel. How can the infinitely holy God, whose justice demands the punishment of every sin, be the same God who declares guilty sinners not guilty, righteous, and accepted in His sight? If God merely overlooks sin, His justice is compromised. If He merely condemns sinners without offering rescue, His love remains unrevealed.

The answer that Soteriology provides is the penal substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. The Son of God became incarnate in the fullness of human nature, lived the life of perfect obedience to the law that every sinner owed and none could offer, and then, at the cross, bore in His own body the penalty that divine justice required for the sins of His people. The wrath of God that justice demanded was poured out, exhaustively and finally, upon the one who knew no sin, that those who are in Him might become the righteousness of God. The cross is not the suspension of divine justice; it is its most perfect and final satisfaction. And it is precisely because justice has been fully satisfied in the death of the Son that the Father can be both just and the justifier, not one at the expense of the other, but both simultaneously, in the same act of sovereign grace.

This answer is not merely the best answer available; it is the only answer the Scripture offers. The history of theology is littered with the wreckage of every attempt to provide an alternative: the moral influence theory, which makes the cross an example of love but not a satisfaction of justice; the governmental theory, which preserves the form of retribution but empties it of its personal and substitutionary character; and the various Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian schemes, which attempt to reduce the problem by reducing the guilt. Soteriology, grounded in the inerrant Word of God, insists with the full weight of the biblical testimony that the only answer to the first great question is the cross of Jesus Christ and the atonement He accomplished there.

What makes this answer so staggering is not merely its logical sufficiency but its moral beauty. The cross does not resolve the dilemma of Romans 3:26 by finding a loophole in divine justice or by God looking the other way at human guilt. It resolves it by the most breathtaking act of voluntary substitution in the history of the universe: the eternal Son of God, who was under no obligation of any kind to sinners who had willfully rebelled against Him, freely descended into the condition of those sinners, bore their guilt as His own, and absorbed into His own person the full penalty that divine righteousness demanded. This is what Paul means when he writes that God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21, NASB 1995). The answer to the first great question of Soteriology is not a doctrine but a Person, and that Person died.

The practical weight of this answer for the believing soul is difficult to overstate. Every time a justified sinner stands before God, in prayer, in worship, in the moment of death, or at the final judgment, he stands not on the basis of his own moral record but on the basis of Christ's. The verdict that was rendered at the cross, "it is finished" (John 19:30, NASB 1995), is the verdict that stands over every soul who by faith has been united to the One who spoke it. The answer to the question of how a just God justifies sinners is therefore not merely an answer to a theological problem; it is the foundation of the believer's entire security, peace, and hope before the tribunal of God.

B. How Can Dead Sinners Be Made Alive?

The second great question that Soteriology must answer is equally urgent, equally impossible by any merely human account, and equally answered only by the sovereign grace of God. Ephesians 2:1–5 describes the condition of every unbeliever in terms that admit of no attenuation: "dead in your trespasses and sins", not wounded, not weakened, not disadvantaged, but dead. The unregenerate person, Paul insists, walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, and according to the lusts of the flesh, being by nature a child of wrath. This is not a description of the especially wicked; it is the universal condition of every person who has not yet been born again by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

The answer is regeneration, the sovereign, monergistic, instantaneous act of the Holy Spirit by which He implants new spiritual life in the dead sinner, gives him a new heart with new affections and a new will, opens his blind eyes to see the glory of Christ in the gospel, and enables him to repent and believe in the Savior he could not previously desire. This is the new birth of which Jesus speaks with such solemnity to Nicodemus in John 3: "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3, NASB 1995). It is the fulfillment of the great New Covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:26, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you", in which God Himself takes responsibility for the transformation of the human heart, not as a response to human initiative, but as the sovereign act from which human faith proceeds.

These two great questions, the legal question of how God can justify the guilty, and the vital question of how the dead can be made alive, structure the entire discipline of Soteriology. Every major doctrine within the locus is the answer, from one angle or another, to one or both of these questions. Justification answers the legal question definitively. Regeneration answers the vital question definitively. And glorification announces the final, irreversible, eschatological completion of both.

It is important to see how these two questions are related to each other, not merely parallel. The sinner who stands before God is both guilty, bearing the legal weight of actual transgressions against the divine law, and dead, lacking the spiritual capacity to respond to God, to desire holiness, or to receive the gospel with saving faith. Both problems must be addressed, and neither can be addressed by the sinner himself. This is why the gospel is not a self-help program, a moral improvement scheme, or an invitation to the naturally capable to make better choices. It is an announcement of what God has done for those who were both condemned and incapable, and it is the most extraordinary announcement in the history of human speech.

The relationship between these two answers, justification and regeneration, also carries profound implications for how we understand conversion and the Christian life. The one who has been justified has a new legal standing: declared righteous in the sight of God, freed from condemnation, and clothed in the imputed righteousness of Christ. The one who has been regenerated has a new spiritual nature: desires that have been reoriented toward

God, a will that can now freely choose holiness, and a mind that can receive and delight in spiritual truth. Both are necessary, both are given by grace, and both are the gift of the same triune God who determined to answer both questions fully and finally in the person and work of His Son.

III. The Trinitarian Architecture of Salvation

The Father Plans, the Son Accomplishes, the Spirit Applies

A. The Father's Eternal Purpose

The doctrine of salvation has its ultimate origin not in any event in history but in an eternal decree within the Godhead itself. Before the mountains were brought forth, before the foundations of the earth were laid, before a single creature drew breath or a single sin was committed, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, purposed in Himself the salvation of a people who would glorify His grace forever. This is the breathtaking claim of Ephesians 1:4–5: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.” The salvation that a sinner receives in time was planned by the Father in eternity, with sovereign precision and holy love, before that sinner ever existed.

This eternal purpose of the Father is not a general intention toward humanity as a whole but a specific election of particular individuals, those given by the Father to the Son, as Christ Himself repeatedly affirms in the Gospel of John (“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,” 6:37; “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world,” 17:6). The elect are not chosen because of anything foreseen in them, not foreseen faith, not foreseen obedience, not any quality that distinguishes them from the non-elect. They are chosen solely according to the good pleasure of the Father's will (Ephesians 1:5), in a freedom that is unconditioned by anything outside of God Himself.

The pastoral effect of this doctrine, rightly understood, is not the cold abstraction that its critics fear but the warmest and most grounding assurance that a believer can possess. Your salvation did not begin on the day you first believed; it began in the eternal purpose of the Father who loved you before time began. The faith you exercised was the gift He had purposed to give you. The grace you received was the grace He had determined to bestow. There is no contingency in the salvation of the elect, no possibility of failure, no loose end left unresolved, because the God who planned it is the God who controls all things, and His purposes are as eternal and as immovable as He is.

It must also be noted that the Father's eternal purpose is not merely a decree of bare election but a rich and complex plan that encompasses the entire sweep of the history of salvation. He not only chose a people; He appointed a Mediator, established the terms of the covenant, ordered the history of redemption through the patriarchs and prophets and the nation of Israel, and prepared every circumstance that would attend the fullness of time in which the Son would enter the world. The plan of the Father is the blueprint of all redemptive history, and every event in that history, from the call of Abraham to the crucifixion of Christ to the conversion of the last elect sinner before the return of the Lord, is the unfolding of what was settled in eternity past.

This vision of the Father's sovereign purpose ought to shape the way every believer reads the whole of Scripture. The Old Testament is not a collection of interesting historical stories that happened to precede Christianity; it is

the progressive unfolding of the Father's eternal plan, with every covenant, every sacrifice, every prophecy, and every type pointing forward to the moment when the fullness of time would come and God would send forth His Son (Galatians 4:4). And the New Testament is not merely the record of that moment but the interpretation of its eternal significance, the revelation that what happened at the cross and at the empty tomb was not an accident of Roman politics or a tragedy of Jewish rejection, but the precise execution of what the Father had determined before the foundation of the world.

B. The Son's Accomplished Redemption

What the Father purposed in eternity, the Son accomplished in history. The incarnation of the eternal Son of God, the taking of a full human nature into personal union with the divine nature in the womb of a virgin, was not a contingency plan but the eternal strategy of the triune God, the moment toward which all of redemptive history had been pointing since the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15. The Son came not merely to teach, not merely to model a better way of life, and not merely to inspire martyrdom by His death. He came to save: "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21, NASB 1995). The name itself is the mission.

The accomplished redemption of the Son encompasses both His active and His passive obedience. By His active obedience, the entirety of His sinless life, in which He kept the law of God perfectly in every dimension and under every circumstance that His people had violated, He procured for them a positive righteousness that could be credited to their account in justification. By His passive obedience, the suffering and death of the cross, in which He bore the full weight of divine wrath for the sins of His people, exhausting the penalty that divine justice demanded, He secured for them the forgiveness of every transgression. The cross is therefore not merely a demonstration of love; it is a forensic transaction in which the debt of sin is paid, the wrath of God is propitiated, and the bondage of guilt is broken.

The resurrection that followed the crucifixion was not merely a dramatic reversal or a proof of Christ's divine identity, though it was both of those things. It was the Father's public vindication of the Son, His declaration that the atoning work was complete and accepted, and the guarantee of the resurrection and justification of all who are united to Christ by faith. Paul makes this connection explicit in Romans 4:25, writing that Christ "was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (NASB 1995). The empty tomb is not merely a biographical fact about Jesus; it is the receipt for the debt that was paid at the cross.

The ascension of Christ to the right hand of the Father is the third and often neglected act of the Son's accomplished redemption. Having suffered, died, and risen, the incarnate Son ascended to the place of supreme authority and intercession, where He now pleads the merit of His sacrifice on behalf of all His people (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34). The believer does not relate to a Christ who once died and is now merely a memory or a historical figure; the believer relates to a living, reigning, interceding Lord who is actively engaged in the completion of the salvation He accomplished at Calvary. This high priestly ministry of the ascended Christ is the present dimension of the Son's soteriological work, and it will not cease until the last enemy has been destroyed and the kingdom is delivered up to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24–28).

C. The Spirit's Sovereign Application

The accomplishment of redemption by the Son, however sufficient in itself for the salvation of every soul for whom it was designed, does not automatically produce the salvation of those souls. The benefits secured at the cross must be applied, to specific individuals, in specific moments of time, through the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who regenerates the dead sinner (John 3:5–8; Titus 3:5), who produces the repentance and faith by which the sinner is united to Christ (Acts 11:18; Ephesians 2:8–9), who indwells and seals the believer (Ephesians 1:13–14), who progressively transforms the believer into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18), and who will ultimately glorify the bodies of the redeemed at the resurrection (Romans 8:11).

The Spirit's work of application is sovereign in precisely the same sense that the Father's work of election and the Son's work of atonement are sovereign: it is not contingent upon the prior willingness, cooperating effort, or moral improvement of the sinner. The Spirit does not wait for the sinner to become receptive before He regenerates; He regenerates in order to make the sinner receptive. This is the crucial distinction between the Reformed understanding of salvation and every form of synergism: in the Reformed account, God does not respond to the sinner's free choice by graciously assisting it; He acts first, giving the very capacity for faith that He then invites the sinner to exercise.

The ministry of the Spirit in applying salvation is also the ministry by which the objective work of Christ becomes the subjective experience of the believer. Christ died for sins objectively, outside of us, in history, at a specific place and time. But that objective work becomes ours only as the Spirit unites us to Christ, opening our eyes to see His glory, softening our hearts to receive His grace, and sealing us with His own presence as the guarantee of our inheritance. The Reformers spoke of this as the distinction between the *historia salutis*, the history of salvation accomplished in Christ, and the *ordo salutis*, the order of salvation applied by the Spirit. Both are essential, and neither is complete without the other.

The Spirit's work does not terminate with regeneration and conversion. He is the constant companion and enabler of the believer's entire Christian life, from the first moment of new birth to the final breath before glory. He intercedes for believers with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26). He produces in them the fruit of Christlike character (Galatians 5:22–23). He illuminates the Scripture so that its meaning is not merely read but received (1 Corinthians 2:12–14). He assures the believer of his adoption (Romans 8:15–16). And He preserves the believer in grace, so that the salvation the Father purposed and the Son purchased is certain of reaching its consummation in glorification. The Holy Spirit is not a secondary or supplementary actor in the drama of salvation; He is the indispensable agent without whom the Father's eternal purpose and the Son's accomplished redemption would never reach their intended recipients.

IV. The Five Solas as the Architecture of This Series

Reformation Theology as the Organizing Framework of Soteriology

A. The Grammar of the Gospel

The five solas of the Reformation, *Sola Gratia* (grace alone), *Sola Fide* (faith alone), *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (to God's glory alone), are not merely historical slogans or denominational shibboleths. They are the structural grammar of the biblical gospel, the five interlocking affirmations without all of which the saving message of Scripture collapses into something less than the good

news of God. Together, they constitute the theological architecture within which this entire series of thirty-five lessons will be conducted.

Sola Gratia, by grace alone, affirms that the ultimate and exclusive source of salvation is the sovereign mercy of God, not any quality, merit, or cooperative effort of the sinner. *Sola Fide*, through faith alone, affirms that the alone instrument by which the sinner receives the righteousness of Christ and is thereby justified before God is faith: not faith plus works, not faith plus sacraments, not faith plus moral improvement. *Solus Christus*, in Christ alone, affirms that the sole ground and sufficient basis of salvation is the person and work of Jesus Christ: His righteous life, His atoning death, and His vindicating resurrection. No other mediator, no other sacrifice, no other name contributes anything to what He has accomplished fully and finally.

Sola Scriptura, by Scripture alone, affirms that the authoritative source from which all soteriological doctrine must be derived is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. And *Soli Deo Gloria*, to God's glory alone, affirms that the ultimate purpose of salvation is the display of the infinite perfections of the triune God, who in saving sinners demonstrates His justice, His love, His wisdom, His power, and His faithfulness in a way that nothing else in the created order could exhibit so completely. These five affirmations will function throughout this series not merely as occasional reference points but as the permanent, structuring convictions of the entire doctrinal investigation.

The internal logic that connects these five solas to one another is not merely historical but theological. If salvation is by grace alone, then faith cannot be a human contribution to salvation but must itself be a gift of grace, and thus *Sola Gratia* grounds *Sola Fide*. If salvation is through faith alone, then it must be faith directed toward something sufficient to save, and thus *Sola Fide* requires *Solus Christus*. If salvation is in Christ alone, then the knowledge of that Christ must come from somewhere authoritative and sufficient, and thus *Solus Christus* requires *Sola Scriptura*. And if all of this is true, then there is no ground for human boasting in any dimension of the saving process, and the only appropriate response is the doxology of *Soli Deo Gloria*. The five solas are not five independent affirmations; they are one integrated confession of the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The pastoral power of this interconnected confession is that it leaves no room for the soul to rest in anything other than Christ. When tempted to ground assurance in the quality of one's repentance, *Sola Fide* directs the soul back to Christ. When tempted to earn God's favor through religious performance, *Sola Gratia* reminds the soul that grace is free. When the church is tempted to supplement the gospel with human wisdom or ecclesiastical tradition, *Sola Scriptura* calls her back to the Word. And when any aspect of the Christian life begins to orbit around the glory of the believer rather than the glory of God, *Soli Deo Gloria* reorients the whole. The Reformers did not invent these affirmations; they recovered them from the apostolic testimony of Scripture, and the church in every generation is impoverished to the degree that she forgets them.

B. The Historical Necessity of the Reformation Doctrine

It is impossible to study Soteriology faithfully without engaging the history of doctrinal controversy that has shaped its formulation. The doctrine of salvation, more than any other locus in systematic theology, has been the site of the church's most consequential theological battles. The Pelagian controversy of the fifth century, in which Augustine defended the Pauline gospel of sovereign grace against Pelagius's confident assertion of human moral capacity, was not a peripheral dispute. It was a battle for the gospel itself. Augustine's insight, confirmed by the

Council of Carthage in 418, was that any account of salvation that attributes moral initiative or saving capacity to the fallen human will is not merely theologically inadequate but pastorally dangerous.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century fought the same battle on different terrain. Luther's recovery of justification by faith alone was not a new invention but a recovery of the Augustinian and Pauline gospel that had been buried under centuries of sacramental and meritocratic accretion. When Luther declared that the article of justification is the article by which the church stands or falls, he was not being hyperbolic; he was recognizing that a church which requires human cooperation with infused grace, supplemented by meritorious works and purified through purgatory, has replaced the good news of what God has done with the bad news of what the sinner must still accomplish.

The debates of the Reformation were not merely academic controversies among professional theologians; they were disputes about the eternal welfare of souls. The question of whether a sinner is justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ received through faith alone, or by an infused righteousness produced through the cooperation of grace and human will, is not a question that can be treated as a minor point of doctrinal preference. It is the question upon which the entire structure of Christian hope rests. A soul that trusts in its own cooperation with grace for its standing before God is trusting in something that will fail. A soul that trusts in the imputed righteousness of Christ alone, received through faith alone, is trusting in something that cannot fail. The pastoral stakes of the Reformation debate are nothing less than the security of every believing soul.

The contemporary relevance of these historical battles is frequently underestimated. There is a comfortable assumption in many evangelical circles that the Reformation controversies are settled, that the divisions of the sixteenth century need not define the theology of the twenty-first, and that the ecumenical impulse should lead the church toward a soft consensus that sets aside the sharper distinctions the Reformers drew. But the doctrinal pressures that produced the medieval distortions of the gospel have not disappeared; they have merely taken new forms. The therapeutic culture's reduction of salvation to psychological healing, the prosperity gospel's transformation of grace into divine obligation, and the moralistic therapeutic deism that pervades popular evangelical preaching are all, at their root, variations on the ancient error of placing something other than the sovereign grace of God at the center of the salvation story. The five solas remain as necessary as ever.

V. The Methodological Principle

Scripture Alone as the Sufficient and Authoritative Guide

A. The Governing Rubric: Affirm What Scripture Affirms

The methodological principle governing every lesson in this series mirrors the principle established in every preceding series in this systematic theology curriculum: we will affirm everything Scripture teaches about salvation and refuse to speculate beyond what Scripture reveals. In the case of Soteriology, this principle carries a weight that is both theological and pastoral. The doctrine of salvation is one in which the cultural pressure to minimize or redirect is among the strongest in all of theology. The therapeutic culture presses us toward a salvation that addresses psychological needs rather than legal guilt. The egalitarian spirit of the age presses us toward an election conditioned upon human choice rather than sovereign grace. The spirit of ecumenism presses us toward a justification reconcilable with the Roman Catholic doctrine of infused righteousness.

The Reformed tradition, grounded in the conviction that Scripture is the inerrant and infallible Word of God, has no principled basis for any of these accommodations. If the Holy Spirit has chosen to describe salvation in terms of unconditional election, monergistic regeneration, imputed righteousness, and the perseverance of the saints, then the church is bound to receive those descriptions as the Word of God and to form her theology accordingly. The history of doctrine has demonstrated with sobering consistency that every dilution of the Reformation's soteriological testimony produces a corresponding dilution of the gospel itself. Soteriology that is not grounded in sovereign grace inevitably becomes a theology of human achievement, and a religion of human achievement is not Christianity; it is the oldest and most persistent counterfeit.

The positive dimension of this commitment to *Sola Scriptura* is equally important. It is not merely a principle of negation, a refusal to add to Scripture or to accommodate its teaching to cultural pressures. It is a principle of confidence: the confidence that what the Holy Spirit has revealed in Scripture is sufficient for the church's knowledge of salvation, sufficient for the believer's assurance, sufficient for the pastor's preaching, and sufficient for the sinner's conversion. The church does not need the traditions of men to supplement the apostolic testimony. She does not need the latest findings of social science to make the gospel relevant. She does not need the approval of the surrounding culture to validate the claims of Scripture. She needs only to receive what has been given, to preach what has been revealed, and to trust that the Word of God will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it (Isaiah 55:11).

This methodological commitment also has direct implications for the pastoral use of the doctrine of salvation. When a congregation's theology of salvation is shaped by Scripture rather than by cultural accommodation, the pastoral results are transformative. Prayer becomes the earnest address of a creature who knows it has nothing to offer and everything to receive. Repentance becomes genuine rather than performative, because sin is understood as a real offense against a real God rather than as a personal failure to reach one's potential. Assurance becomes stable rather than anxious, because it is grounded in the objective promises of God rather than in the fluctuating quality of subjective experience. And worship becomes genuinely doxological rather than therapeutically self-focused, because the God being worshipped is understood to be the sovereign Giver of an entirely unmerited and inexhaustibly sufficient grace.

B. The Scope of This Series

Thirty-five lessons across twelve units will trace the full sweep of biblical Soteriology from its eternal foundation in the divine decree to its eschatological consummation in glorification. Unit 1 (Lessons 1–3) establishes the prolegomena: the nature and glory of the subject, its historical unfolding in the life of the church, and the logical order (*ordo salutis*) by which God's saving work is applied. Unit 2 (Lessons 4–7) examines the eternal foundation: the covenant of redemption, unconditional election, the doctrine of reprobation, and the crucial question of election's relationship to evangelism. Unit 3 (Lessons 8–9) investigates Union with Christ, the ground and source of all saving benefits.

Units 4 through 9 trace the application of salvation in the life of the individual believer: Effectual Calling and Regeneration (Lessons 10–12), Conversion through Repentance and Faith (Lessons 13–15), Justification (Lessons 16–20), Adoption (Lessons 21–22), Sanctification (Lessons 23–26), and Perseverance (Lessons 27–29). Unit 10 (Lessons 30–31) addresses the doctrine of Assurance. Unit 11 (Lessons 32–34) traces the eschatological completion of salvation in Glorification, the resurrection of the body, and the new heavens and new earth. And

Unit 12 (Lesson 35) brings the entire series to its doxological conclusion by revisiting the golden chain of Romans 8:29–30.

This scope reflects the conviction that Soteriology cannot be done piecemeal. The various doctrines within the locus are organically connected: election leads to effectual calling, effectual calling to regeneration, regeneration to faith, faith to justification, justification to adoption, adoption to sanctification, and sanctification through perseverance to glorification. The student who engages this curriculum from beginning to end will discover, by the final lesson, that the doctrine of salvation has not merely informed the mind but has begun to reshape the heart, producing a greater gratitude for grace, a deeper humility before God, a more earnest love for Christ, and a more abandoned worship of the triune God who purposed, accomplished, and applied, to the praise of His glorious grace, the salvation that the student has been tracing across thirty-five lessons.

The sequence of the series is also theologically intentional in a way that reflects the actual logic of the gospel. We begin with the eternal foundation of election not because it is the most emotionally accessible entry point, it is not, but because it is the true starting point of the story. The gospel is not a story about what a sinner decided to do with God; it is a story about what God decided to do with sinners before they existed, and that story begins in eternity. We end with glorification not because it is the most immediately relevant topic, for most students, it is not yet immediate, but because it is the proper terminus of the story, the point at which the saving purpose of God reaches its appointed and irrevocable completion. The full arc, from eternity to eternity, is the only arc that can adequately display the glory of sovereign grace.

VI. The Doxological Conclusion

Soteriology Terminates in the Worship of the God Whose Grace Is Greater Than All Our Sin

There is a moment in the first chapter of Ephesians that captures, in miniature, everything this series aspires to produce. Paul has been dictating with the concentrated intensity of a man who cannot contain what he is saying, piling clause upon clause, doctrine upon doctrine, glory upon glory, and the whole sustained movement of his thought reaches its first great crest in verse 6: “to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” Three times in the span of eleven verses, in verse 6, in verse 12, and in verse 14, Paul returns to this refrain: the ultimate purpose of election, redemption, and the sealing of the Spirit is “to the praise of His glory.” The doctrine of salvation, for Paul, does not terminate in a better life for the believer or even in the eternal happiness of the redeemed. It terminates in the display of the glory of God, specifically, the glory of His grace.

This doxological orientation is not a pious addendum to the doctrine of salvation; it is its governing purpose. When God chose to save sinners rather than simply to condemn them all with the justice every one deserved, He did so not merely out of compassion (though He is infinitely compassionate) and not merely out of love (though He is infinitely loving). He did so in order that, through the church, “the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10, NASB 1995). The salvation of every sinner is a display, a cosmic, eternal, infinitely significant display, of attributes of God that could be shown in their full glory in no other way.

The student who completes this series and comes away merely more informed has not yet received what the Spirit intends the doctrine of salvation to produce. Soteriology is not designed to fill notebooks; it is designed to

fill hearts with wonder. It is designed to produce the response of the redeemed in Revelation 5:9–12, who sing to the Lamb who was slain a new song: “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” It is designed to produce the response of Paul at the end of eleven chapters of the most rigorous theological argument in the history of human literature: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:33, 36, NASB 1995).

Every lesson in this series will be offered in the conviction that the proper terminus of all soteriological reflection is not intellectual satisfaction but doxological response. The God who planned your salvation before the foundation of the world, who sent His only Son to die the death your sins deserved, who raised Him from the dead as the firstfruits of those who sleep, who sent His Spirit to make you alive when you were dead and to unite you to Christ by a bond that neither death nor life nor powers nor things present nor things to come can sever, that God is worthy of every thought, every affection, every act of worship that a redeemed sinner can offer, across every moment of every day, into the endless ages of the age to come.

The doxological aim of this series is not, however, a retreat from doctrinal rigor. On the contrary, the more precisely and completely the doctrine of salvation is understood, the more overwhelming the worship it produces will be. Vague impressions of grace produce vague gratitude. A clear-eyed, theologically precise grasp of what election means, what imputation accomplishes, what regeneration achieves, and what glorification promises produces the kind of gratitude that falls silent before it speaks, that weeps before it sings, and that, when it finally does find words, can only echo the doxology of Romans 11:36: “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.” This is the goal. This is the measure by which the success of this series will be evaluated, not by how much students know at the end, but by how deeply they worship the God who has given them everything they know.

It is fitting, therefore, to close this first lesson with the same text that has served as the series verse and that will stand as the governing doxological banner over every lesson that follows. Paul writes to the Ephesian church, and through them, to every congregation in every century that will receive these words as the living and active Word of God, “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” (Ephesians 1:3, NASB 1995). The study of Soteriology begins and ends with a blessing, not a blessing that the student offers to God as the fruit of his theological effort, but a blessing that God has already lavished upon the student before the first page was turned, before the first lesson was taught, before the first breath of faith was drawn. That is grace. That is the gospel. And that is the inexhaustible subject of everything that follows.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Romans 1:16, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Soteriology	From the Greek <i>sōtēria</i> (salvation) and <i>logos</i> (word, study). The branch of systematic theology that investigates the full scope of the triune God's saving work, from the eternal election of the Father, through the accomplished redemption of the Son, to the applied grace of the Spirit, encompassing election, effectual calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.
Ordo Salutis	Latin: "order of salvation." The logical (not necessarily chronological) sequence in which the various aspects of salvation are applied to the individual believer by the Holy Spirit. The Reformed <i>ordo salutis</i> : election → calling → regeneration → conversion (repentance and faith) → justification → adoption → sanctification → perseverance → glorification. The <i>ordo</i> establishes that regeneration logically precedes faith, <i>contra</i> Arminian synergism.
Sola Gratia	Latin: "by grace alone." The Reformation affirmation that the ultimate and exclusive source and ground of salvation is the sovereign mercy of the triune God, not any quality, merit, cooperative effort, or foreseen virtue of the sinner. <i>Sola gratia</i> requires affirming that faith itself is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 1:29), not the sinner's independent contribution to his own salvation.
Sola Fide	Latin: "through faith alone." The Reformation affirmation that the alone instrument by which a sinner receives the righteousness of Christ and is thereby justified before God is faith, apart from works of the law (Romans 3:28). The Reformation formula: we are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone, it always produces the fruit of love, obedience, and good works as evidence of its genuine saving character (James 2:14–26).
Pactum Salutis	Latin: "covenant of redemption." The eternal, intra-Trinitarian agreement within the Godhead to plan, accomplish, and apply the salvation of the elect. The Father sends the Son (John 6:37–39); the Son assumes human nature and bears the penalty of sin (John 10:17–18; Hebrews 10:5–10); the Spirit applies the accomplished redemption to the elect (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 1:13–14). The <i>pactum salutis</i> is the eternal foundation of the entire <i>ordo salutis</i> .
Monergism	From the Greek <i>monos</i> (alone) and <i>ergon</i> (work). The view that regeneration is entirely the work of God, with no cooperative contribution from the human will. The Spirit acts alone in imparting new spiritual life to the dead sinner. The Reformed position, grounded in John 1:13, Ephesians 2:1, and Ezekiel 36:26. Contrasted with synergism, the view that human will cooperates with divine grace in regeneration.
Synergism	From the Greek <i>syn</i> (together) and <i>ergon</i> (work). The view that salvation involves the cooperation of the human will with divine grace, that the reception of saving grace requires the consent of the human will. Associated with Arminianism and Semi-Pelagianism. The Reformed tradition rejects synergism on the grounds that the unregenerate will is in bondage (John 8:34), spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), and incapable of turning toward God apart from the sovereign prior act of regeneration (John 6:44, 65).
Justification	The forensic (legal/declarative) act of God by which He pronounces the believing sinner righteous in His sight, on the basis of Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer's account and received through faith alone. Justification is a once-for-all verdict, not an ongoing process. The double imputation: the believer's sin is imputed to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21), and Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer (Romans 4:3–6; Philippians 3:9).
Perseverance	The doctrine that all who are truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit will persevere in faith and holiness to the final end and will never ultimately and finally fall away from saving grace, not because of the strength of their own faith, but because of the sovereign preserving power of

	God. Grounded in John 10:27–30, Romans 8:28–39, and Philippians 1:6. Perseverance must be distinguished from presumption: the one who perseveres is the one who continues in faith and the pursuit of holiness.
Glorification	The final, eschatological, and irreversible act of God by which the believing sinner is completely and permanently conformed to the image of Christ, body and soul, freed from every trace of sin, and brought into the fullness of eternal life in the presence of the triune God. In Romans 8:30, Paul speaks of glorification in the past tense (“whom He justified, these He also glorified”), indicating its certainty. Glorification includes the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15:42–57) and the beatific vision, seeing God face to face in the new creation.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that salvation is entirely and exclusively the work of the triune God, planned by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Spirit, and that the sinner contributes absolutely nothing to its procurement. This means believing not merely that grace is important or helpful, but that it is alone sufficient, alone ultimate, and alone glorious. It means believing that the faith by which we are saved is itself a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–9), not the one thing the sinner contributes while God provides the rest. It means believing that the righteousness upon which the believer's justification rests is not his own but Christ's, alien, imputed, received through faith alone, and as secure as the perfection of the One whose it is.

We must also believe that these doctrines are not cold abstractions but living realities, that the election Paul describes in Ephesians 1 is a doctrine that should make every believer fall to his knees in gratitude, not merely nod with theological satisfaction. The goal of every lesson in this series is not merely informed minds but transformed hearts, hearts that have understood the grace of God so clearly, and been so astonished by it, that worship becomes not an occasional exercise but the permanent orientation of the soul toward the God who has saved it.

We must believe, furthermore, that the doctrines of sovereign grace are not in competition with the genuine free offer of the gospel to all people without distinction. The God who has elected a particular people has also commanded the gospel to be proclaimed to every creature, and He uses that proclamation as the means by which His elect are brought to saving faith. The student who understands this will neither become passive in evangelism because of election nor anxious about election because of the apparent freedom of the gospel invitation. He will preach freely, pray earnestly, and leave the results to the sovereignty of the God who has ordained both the end and the means.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The Apostle Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:15–23 models the emotional register that a right understanding of salvation produces in the heart of the believer. He prays that the Father of glory would give the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, that the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened, that they would know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance, and the surpassing greatness of His power toward those who believe. The heart that has genuinely grasped the doctrine of salvation does not become puffed up with theological pride; it becomes humble, astonished, and overwhelmed with a gratitude that naturally and irresistibly expresses itself in worship.

Desire, above all, the experiential knowledge of these realities, not merely their theoretical formulation. The most precise articulation of the doctrine of justification is worthless to the soul that has not experienced the peace of God that flows from a right standing before the divine tribunal (Romans 5:1). The most rigorous exposition of the doctrine of election is spiritually empty if it does not produce in the heart the wonder of the man who, walking through a field, discovers a treasure and sells everything he has to possess it (Matthew 13:44). These are doctrines meant to be known not only in the mind but in the marrow, and the measure of progress in this series will not be how much can be recited but how deeply one has been undone and remade by the grace being studied.

Desire also the willingness to be challenged. Some of the doctrines in this series will press against deeply held assumptions, cultural instincts, and even sincere but inadequately formed convictions. The student who approaches those moments with defensiveness rather than openness will miss the sanctifying work that the Spirit intends the encounter with Scripture to produce. True theological growth is not the accumulation of arguments for positions already held; it is the progressive submission of every thought and conviction to the authority of the living Word of God, even when, especially when, that submission requires the painful revision of what was previously believed.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Begin this series with a devotional, meditative reading of Ephesians 1:3–14 in its entirety. Read it slowly, pausing at each clause to ask: what does this say about God? What does this say about me? What does this produce in my heart? Note every occurrence of the phrase “to the praise of His glory” or “to the praise of the glory of His grace,” and ask whether the doctrines Paul is describing, election, redemption, forgiveness, the sealing of the Spirit, actually produce that response in you.
- Read Romans 3:21–26 slowly and analytically, identifying every soteriological term Paul employs: justified, grace, redemption, propitiation, righteousness, faith. Look up each term in a theological dictionary or lexicon. Ask how each term relates to the two great questions of Soteriology: the legal problem (how can God justify sinners?) and the vital problem (how can dead sinners be made alive?). Write a paragraph in your own words explaining how the cross resolves the dilemma of Romans 3:26.
- Survey the landscape of popular Christian teaching you encounter in a given week, sermons, songs, books, social media posts. Ask honestly: is the Soteriology implicit in these sources Trinitarian? Is salvation presented as entirely God’s work, or is the sinner’s choice or effort presented as the decisive factor? Is Christ presented as an example to imitate or as a Savior who has done what we could not do? Is God’s glory the explicit goal, or has human flourishing quietly taken its place?
- Commit to reading primary sources alongside this series. For Soteriology, the essential texts are: Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III; Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520); John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647); Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (1754); Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*; and Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 3.
- Pray the doctrine of Soteriology back to God throughout this series. When you study election, pray a prayer of gratitude for being chosen before you deserved to be chosen. When you study justification, pray a prayer of peace rooted in the imputed righteousness of Christ. When you study regeneration, thank the Spirit for doing what you could not do for yourself. When you study glorification, ask the Spirit to make you long for what He has promised to complete.

Key Texts: *Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:1–10; Romans 3:21–26; 8:28–30; Titus 3:4–7; John 3:1–8; 6:37–44*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before beginning this study, how would you honestly describe the Soteriology that has shaped your Christian life to this point? Do you think of salvation primarily as something God has done for you, something you have done with God's help, or some combination of the two? How does your functional understanding of salvation affect the way you pray, the way you face temptation, and the way you interpret your own failures and progress?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Ephesians 1:3–14 carefully. How many distinct soteriological acts does Paul attribute to the triune God in this passage? Which acts does he assign specifically to the Father, which to the Son, and which to the Spirit? What phrase appears three times in verses 6, 12, and 14, and what does its repetition indicate about the ultimate purpose of salvation?
- Read Ephesians 2:1–10. How does Paul describe the condition of the unbeliever in verses 1–3? What are the three sources of the sinner's bondage (verses 2–3)? What is the main verb (verses 4–5), and how does it relate to the description of human condition in verses 1–3? What does "by grace you have been saved" indicate about the temporal status of salvation?
- Read Romans 3:21–26. Identify every soteriological term Paul employs. What problem does Paul's three-chapter indictment in Romans 1:18–3:20 establish that verse 21 then addresses? What does the word "propitiation" in verse 25 mean, and what problem does it resolve? How does verse 26 resolve the tension between divine justice and divine justification?
- Read Romans 8:28–30. What is the logical structure of the "golden chain" Paul describes? Why is it significant that Paul uses the past tense for all five verbs, including "glorified"? What does this indicate about the certainty of the believer's final glorification?
- Read Titus 3:4–7. How does Paul describe the condition that preceded salvation? What does he attribute salvation to (verses 5–6)? What role does the Holy Spirit play? What does the phrase "not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness" establish about the ground of salvation?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson identifies the two great questions of Soteriology: (1) How can a just God justify sinners? and (2) How can dead sinners be made alive? Work through the biblical answer to each question in detail. What specific aspect of Christ's work answers the first question? What specific work of the Spirit answers the second? How are these two questions and their answers related to each other?
- The lesson argues that salvation is Trinitarian in its structure: the Father plans, the Son accomplishes, the Spirit applies. Using Ephesians 1:3–14 as your primary text, trace the specific soteriological contribution of each Person. What would be missing from salvation if any one Person's contribution were removed? What are the pastoral consequences of a Soteriology that focuses exclusively on one Person?
- The lesson explains that the five solas function as the "grammar of the gospel." Working through each sola in sequence, explain what theological error each one is designed to exclude. What specific heresy does Sola Gratia deny? What does Sola Fide preclude? What does Solus Christus rule out? What does Sola Scriptura reject? And what is excluded by the insistence on Soli Deo Gloria?

- The lesson distinguishes between monergism and synergism in the application of salvation. What is the specific exegetical basis for the monergistic view of regeneration from John 1:12–13, Ezekiel 36:26, and Ephesians 2:1? What is the Arminian response, and how does the Reformed tradition evaluate it? Why does this question matter for pastoral practice?
- The lesson suggests that the proper terminus of Soteriology is doxological. Is this claim exegetically defensible, or does it risk subordinating doctrinal precision to emotional experience? How does Paul's own movement from theological argument to doxology in Romans 11:33–36 model the relationship between doctrinal rigor and worshipful response?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the therapeutic culture presses the church toward a Soteriology that addresses psychological needs rather than legal guilt. In what ways have you observed this pressure? What specific theological category (guilt, wrath, propitiation, justification) is most consistently absent from the popular Christianity in your context, and what pastoral consequences has that absence produced?
- Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:15–23 is a prayer for the experiential and transformative reception of soteriological truth. Is this your own experience of the doctrines of salvation? Do the truths of election, justification, and glorification produce in you wonder and gratitude, or do they remain at the level of propositions believed but not felt? What would it mean to pray Paul's own prayer for yourself throughout this series?
- The lesson identifies five areas in which popular Christianity accommodates the spirit of the age in its Soteriology: therapeutic reframing, conditioned election, sacramental cooperationism, moral synergism, and human-centered teleology. Identify which of these accommodations you are most personally susceptible to, and explain why. What specific biblical text most directly addresses and corrects that accommodation in your own thinking?
- Which doctrine within Soteriology do you find most personally challenging, not intellectually, but spiritually? Is there a doctrine (perhaps election, reprobation, perseverance, or total inability) about which you feel resistance that might be more emotional or volitional than exegetical? Commit that area to prayer, and plan to engage it with particular care when you reach the lessons that address it.
- This is Lesson 1 of 35 in a series that will trace the full arc of God's saving purpose from eternity to eternity. What do you hope this series will produce in you by the time you reach Lesson 35? Frame your answer not merely in terms of knowledge acquired but in terms of character formed, worship deepened, and grace more fully received. Share your answer with a fellow student or a trusted friend, and plan to revisit it at the close of the series.

Prayer Focus

Open this first lesson of the Soteriology series with a slow, meditative reading of Ephesians 1:3–14, not as a text to be analyzed but as a text to be received. Read it as the testimony of a man who cannot contain the wonder of what God has done, who piles phrase upon phrase and clause upon clause not because he is being careless with his argument but because he is overwhelmed with his subject. Read it as a description of your own salvation, chosen, predestined, redeemed, forgiven, sealed, and allow the cumulative weight of these realities to press upon your heart with the full force they deserve. The appropriate response to this passage is not first analysis but adoration; let the theology produce the doxology before you begin to dissect the doctrine.

Spend time in Trinitarian adoration, moving through the three Persons in the structure that the text itself provides. Begin with the Father, who is the ultimate architect of your salvation, who chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world (v. 4), who predestined you to adoption (v. 5), who has made known to you the mystery of His will (v. 9), and in whom you have obtained an inheritance (v. 11). This is not a God who reacted to your sin with a contingency plan; this is a God who purposed your salvation before you or your sin existed, in the freedom of His sovereign love and for the display of the glory of His grace. Adore Him for the eternity of His purpose, the certainty of His plan, and the freedom of His love.

Move to the Son, in whom every spiritual blessing has been given (v. 3), in whom you were chosen (v. 4), through whose blood you have been redeemed and in whom you have received forgiveness of sins (v. 7). Every blessing the Father purposed in eternity was purchased by the Son in history, at the cost of His own blood. Adore Him for the cost of His obedience, the completeness of His sacrifice, and the sufficiency of His atoning work, and let that adoration be the kind that only a bankrupt soul who has been told that all debts are paid can truly feel. Recall that His active obedience procured the righteousness that clothes you, and His passive obedience exhausted the wrath that threatened you, and that the risen Lord who now intercedes for you at the right hand of the Father is the same Lord who refused to let a single one whom the Father gave Him be lost (John 6:39).

Conclude with the Spirit, in whom you were sealed after hearing the word of truth and believing (vv. 13–14), who is the pledge of your inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession. The Spirit is the divine guarantee that the salvation the Father purposed and the Son purchased will certainly and fully reach its consummation in your glorification. His presence within you is not a suggestion that salvation is likely but a divine down payment that it is certain. Adore Him for the sovereign intimacy of His indwelling, the power of His regenerating work, and the unbreakable certainty of the seal He has placed upon you.

Pray for this series in three specific directions. First, for receptivity: that the Spirit who inspired these doctrines would also illumine them in your mind, soften any resistance in your heart, and make you willing to receive everything Scripture teaches about salvation. Second, for the church: that congregations would find in these doctrines not an abstract system but the living truth of what God has done for them in Christ, and that this truth would produce the kind of preaching, the kind of worship, and the kind of discipleship that only a church saturated with sovereign grace can sustain. Third, for the lost: that the same sovereign Spirit who applies the salvation these doctrines describe would be at work in the hearts of those who have not yet believed, opening eyes that are blind, softening hearts that are hardened, and drawing to Christ those who were given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world.

Close with a spoken reading of Ephesians 2:8–9 as a prayer of grateful surrender rather than mere recitation: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Speak it as those who have understood, at least in part, the depth of the grace that these words describe, and resolve, together, that the boasting these words exclude will have no place in the study you are beginning, and that the worship to which they point will be its constant and its ultimate end. Then sit in silence for a moment with the weight of what you have just confessed. This is the grace that will carry you through every lesson that follows: undeserved, unstoppable, and utterly sufficient.

“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.”

Ephesians 1:3, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:1–10, 8–9; Romans 3:21–26; 8:28–30; Titus 3:4–7; John 3:1–8; 6:37–44; Romans 11:33–36

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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