

Position Paper for Redeemer Fellowship Church

Soteriology

Soteriology is a word that simply means “the study of salvation.” It is a specific branch in theology that explores how it is that men are saved from sin and receive eternal life. The doctrines of grace described in this paper outline an understanding of salvation that recognizes God as the supreme and sole actor in the saving of sinful people. It is firmly rooted in the tradition of reformed theology, which provides a method for studying the nature and character of God with God as the starting point and main focus rather than man. Though this understanding of salvation has been ridiculed as being rooted in logic, not Scripture, we pose that God’s Word regularly upholds these truths and teaches them all throughout the Old and New Testament.

In order to grasp how God saves sinners we must first understand the natural state of sinful man prior to salvation. Because of Adam’s sin in Genesis 3, all of us are affected by sin’s curse and inherit a sinful nature from Adam who was the representative of all mankind. This is known as the doctrine of *original sin*. Therefore, the Bible tells us that from the moment we are conceived, the unbeliever is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13), hostile to God (Rom. 5:10, 8:7), and incapable of doing anything that would please God or improve his standing before God (Rom. 3:10-18, 8:8). Each and every human being is born into a state of *total depravity*, also called *total inability*. Because of man’s corruption and fallen state, the only way that salvation could ever be possible is by a miraculous work on God’s part to impart new spiritual life and saving faith to human beings. This is what takes place in the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration. New life and saving faith in Christ are provided by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion. By this faith, produced by the Holy Spirit, man is justified before God, not by anything produced in himself (Ezek. 36:26-27; John 3:1-8; Titus 3:4-7).

Furthermore, there is nothing in any person that motivates God’s saving work in him, it is solely by his good and sovereign decree in *election*. In Ephesians chapter 1 Paul says, “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” In election, God chose those whom he would save before they had ever done anything right or wrong. Salvation is completely a work of God, and he alone deserves the glory. It is God who determined to save sinners, and God who accomplishes the work from beginning to end. God initiates this saving work in us by what is called *effectual calling*, or *irresistible grace*. This is the supernatural calling upon a person’s life by which they are drawn to Christ and are enabled to respond to his call by the Holy Spirit. John 6:44 says, “No one can come to me unless the Father

who sent me draws him.” Because of the total depravity of man, it is necessary that God overcome our will by his grace, or else we would never choose to follow him. By his own will man will never choose Christ, only by God’s gracious work of overcoming our rebellion will we choose to follow him.

All of this was accomplished by Christ’s atoning work on the cross, whereby he bore the wrath of God for all those whom he predestined for salvation and won for them all the benefits that come with salvation. When Christ died on the cross, his atonement was not merely a way to make it possible for us to be saved, it was a *definite atonement*, meaning that it was the act that secured salvation for us. In his death, Christ bore our sin in himself and took the full wrath of God for our sin (1 Peter 2:24, 2 Cor. 5:21). There is no more wrath that those who are in Christ have to face, as Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Paul can say this because Christ served as our substitute when he died on the cross, taking God’s wrath for us, and imputing to us His righteousness.

Because every aspect of our salvation is accomplished by Christ, according to the immutable and infallible decrees of God, we can also rest in the knowledge that our salvation is secure. The final doctrine in the doctrines of grace is called the *perseverance of the saints*. Those of us who belong to Christ have no reason to fear what may come because the God who saves is faithful and will see to it that we persevere to the end (Phil. 1:6). Our confidence in our perseverance in the faith is not rooted in our own abilities or our own faithfulness, but in the faithfulness of Christ who is our good Shepherd. Christ says in John 10:27-30, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, 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. I and the Father are one.”

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:30, “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” There is not a single point on this salvation train where a person falls off. God is the one who predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies, and he has never started that process and not finished it. So we know that if we are called by God, we will eventually be glorified with him in heaven. There is great hope to be found at the end of chapter 8 in Romans where Paul writes, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither

death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

These are beautiful doctrines that magnify the glory of God in salvation and bring us hope when we would otherwise have none. There is much more that could be said regarding these doctrines, and indeed many thousands of pages have been written on the subject, but for now, let us conclude by considering one of the most amazing illustrations of salvation given in scripture: the raising of Lazarus. In John 11 we have this beautiful story laid out for us when Christ, moved by compassion and mercy, simply spoke, “Lazarus, come out,” and then scripture records these words, “the man who had died came out.” This was a miracle, something that never happened, something that was impossible. This dead man came to life and walked out of the grave at Christ’s word. Lazarus was incapable of doing anything to bring himself to life; he was a corpse. He was an inactive agent in his raising to life. The same is true of sinners, we can do nothing to bring ourselves even a hair’s length closer to Christ or salvation, for apart from Christ, we are all spiritual corpses; dead in our sins and trespasses. As the great Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards said, “You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.” A sinner’s only hope is that God, in his mercy and grace, would choose to act and speak new life into them. He has told us in his word that he does exactly that and because of his saving work, he deserves all the glory and praise. He deserves all of our worship.ⁱ

ⁱ For further study:

- [1689 Baptist Confession of Faith](#)
- [What are the Doctrines of Grace?](#) GotQuestions.org
- [What We Believe About 5 Points of Calvinism](#) by John Piper
- [The Sovereignty of God in Salvation](#) by A. W. Pink