

The Church of the Servant King

Soteriology Series

SO_1_Introduction

Definition

The term 'soteriology' is derived from the Greek word σωτηριολογια which means salvation or deliverance. Therefore, soteriology is a study of the doctrines and issues surrounding salvation.

Why is a Study of Soteriology Important?

The answer to this question will become increasingly clear as we progress through the study; however, suffice it to say for now that soteriology represents what is evidently the most comprehensive truth in the Bible. It includes (but is not limited to) the following doctrines, i.e. redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, conviction, repentance, faith, regeneration, forgiveness, justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification.¹ To this list might be added other doctrines and issues such as election, predestination, the free will of man, assurance, the nature of saving faith, and the extent of God's saving work (i.e. universal or limited "atonement") not to mention the related issues concerning the character of God Himself (i.e. His essence and purpose for creating man). As you can see, this subject is so vast and pervasive in Scripture that there is no wonder that Lewis S. Chafer indicates that "it is reasonable to conclude that, in a well-balanced ministry, gospel preaching should account for no less than seventy-five percent of the pulpit testimony."²

Why This Study Now?

This field of doctrine is the prime target of Satan's efforts to deceive the world through confusion and distortion of the truth. In order to fully appreciate the work of our Savior and God's plan for human history, there is no category of Biblical doctrine more critical. With the mass media available in today's society, there has never been a time in human history where the proliferation of error can occur so rapidly and take on so many forms.

Today, the effects of materialism, post-modernism and syncretism are having a dramatic impact upon our society and world as never before. Orthodox doctrines are being replaced with alternative ideas of spirituality, maximizing one's human potential, and social acceptance. One pollster, George Barna, suggests that America's faith in the 21st century will meld Christian themes of love and self-acceptance with Eastern self-divinization and ethical relativity not to mention the effects of Mormonism and other religions such as Islam.³ The results are already widely noted. Church attendance in Great Britain has fallen to less than 6% and the United States is headed in the same direction.

¹ Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), Volume III, 5.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ Dr. J. Scott Horrell, "Soteriology" (Unpublished class notes in Systematic Theology 404N, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000), 1.

There is Enough *Truth in the Lie* to Make it Deceptive!

Satan is not stupid. In fact, he was the most brilliant creature that God ever created (Isa 14; Ezek 28). The result is that even within “Christian” circles, there are widely differing conceptions of what salvation entails. Each different conception contains elements of the Truth, yet only one view is consistent with the total realm of truth in Scripture. Satan realizes that man is easily deceived by partial truth. Some examples follow.⁴

- *Salvation and the time dimension* – there is truth in the fact that aspects of salvation are instantaneous, a process continuing throughout the Christian life, and something to be received in the future. I have referred to these three categories which we will study later in this series as positional, experiential, and ultimate sanctification. An example of a distortion of these truths would be the Reformed view of salvation that believes that unless one demonstrates perseverance (i.e. a certain lifestyle of good works), one is not truly saved. This view confuses the progressive, process, and experiential aspect of salvation with the instantaneous, positional truths of Scripture.
- *Salvation and the focal point of man’s need* – there is truth in the fact that man’s salvation has a horizontal aspect to it. When man’s need for reconciliation with his Creator is met, there can be hope for reconciliation with other members of the human race. Satan’s distortion of the Truth focuses upon the horizontal to the exclusion of the vertical and finds expression in such forms of theology as “relational theology” and “liberation theology” in its various forms. These distortions emphasize the alteration of the structures of society (political, economic, social, etc.) followed by a use of the altered structures to change people. The social gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is one example that view man’s primary need as related to an evil social environment.
- *Salvation and the environment* – there is truth in the fact that God is interested in redeeming/restoring the earth. We know that this will occur in the Millennial, Messianic kingdom of Christ here on earth following Christ’s second advent. Satan’s distortions of this Truth include philosophies that focus man’s primary efforts upon restoration of the environment.
- *Salvation and the character of God* – it is true that God is love. However, it is a distortion of the Truth to emphasize God’s love as the focal point in God’s essence for salvation. Love motivated God to provide a means for man’s salvation, but it is God’s justice and righteousness (holiness) that needs to be satisfied (propitiated). This distortion harkens back to what must have been Lucifer’s original reaction to God’s pronouncement of the sentence at the time of Satan’s fall (Isa 14; Ezek 28).

The Primary Focus of Our Study

Our primary concern in this study will be upon the soteriological Truths from Scripture related to the Church Age believer. We will concentrate upon the primary focus of Scripture, i.e. the necessity for man’s adjustment to God’s character (His holiness), positional truths, the work of God in accomplishing man’s salvation, and man’s need for reconciliation. We will only briefly deal with the other more secondary aspects of salvation such as the deliverance of the nation Israel and restoration of the earth since a more extended study of these aspects of salvation can be included in a study of dispensations and eschatology.

⁴ Many of these categories and examples were obtained from Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 888-905. Some are mine, e.g. ‘salvation and the environment’ and ‘salvation and the character of God.’

