

What is Salvation?

SUMMARY: Salvation is a vast doctrine with many different nuances. God's people have been saved - that is, in its most essential form, that we have been reconciled, justified and redeemed by the propitiatory, substitutionary death of the Son of God.

Acts 4:12 *And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*

Salvation is a rather broad concept incorporating various elements. It basically means that those who are recipients of such a gift are delivered from a number of things. From what are we saved? For those who have been given such a gift, we have experienced, are experiencing and/or will experience salvation from Satan, death, sin, ourselves, the condemnation of the law and even God Himself (from His wrath). We are beneficiaries of grace which encompasses the entirety of our lives. Within this article, we will primarily deal with salvation in a generic sense, that we are saved from sin and its effects.

In order to understand salvation, we must understand sin. While we delve more deeply into the topic of the prevalence of sin in other articles, for now, it will do to define sin as preferring anything to God. As Scripture says,

*"Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD. "For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."*¹

God is our greatest good and to desire anything but for the reflection of His glory is to dishonor Him.

In the beginning, we were created good. We enjoyed uninterrupted fellowship with the Almighty and perfect harmony with each other (man and spouse) until the day when the woman was deceived by the serpent and the man ate of the fruit. This choice brought about the curse of death, both spiritual and physical for mankind. Henceforth, we were all born into this cycle of meaninglessness.

However, even from the fall there were hints of restoration, that things would be made better. Throughout the Scriptures, men and women of God look forward to salvation. This salvation ultimately pointed to the birth of a child named "Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins."²

This saving, or salvation, was accomplished though not through military might or wise teaching, but primarily and ultimately through His death. As the Scriptures have said, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming Himself a curse on

our behalf.³ He bore our sins and died in our place. In this way, Christ has "atoned" for the sins of His people. This atonement is an essential aspect of salvation, although not the only element.

In this article, we hope to accomplish two things. First, we hope to paint a couple of pictures of the atonement (a word describing what happened in relation to Christ's death). Second, we hope to paint a couple of pictures of the entire event of salvation.

Atonement

Many pictures of the atonement have sprouted forth throughout the history of the church. Although they have historically been deemed "theories" of the atonement, such a term can be somewhat misleading. To be sure, they each have their distinctive contributions, but it is not therefore true to say that each is equally valid or important. On the contrary, certain pictures and aspects of the atonement are much more necessary to a proper understanding of Christ's work on the cross.

Penal Substitution:

At the heart of the atonement is "God satisfying himself by substituting himself for us."⁴ This doctrine is essential to a considered view of the cross. We must declare with closed hand⁵ that Jesus bore the penalty (penal) of sin in our place (substitution). While many today would claim that such a view is a case of divine child abuse, such a position is sensational at best. Both Father and Son were working in Trinitarian harmony in the work of atonement. Christ Himself bore the wrath which we deserved.

Pertinent Scriptures:

- Leviticus 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.
 - Especially relevant given Hebrews 10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
- Isaiah 53:4-6,10 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of

³ Galatians 3:13

⁴ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, page 159.

⁵ Closed hand is a term for that of which we are unwilling to let go. We must cling therefore to this doctrine.

¹ Jeremiah 2:12-13

² Matthew 1:21

us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him...But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering...

- Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.
- Mark 14:24 And He said to them, ‘This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many...’
- Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
- Romans 8:3-4 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- 1 Corinthians 5:7 ...Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.
- 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.
- Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’...
- 1 Timothy 2:6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all...
- Hebrews 2:14-15 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.
- Hebrews 9:28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...
- 1 Peter 2:24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.
- 1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit...

Ransom:

Another view of the atonement especially prevalent in the early church is that Christ’s death was a ransom paid to the devil. While Christ is certainly called a ransom, it is altogether inappropriate to say that the devil is therefore the recipient. We must bear in mind that even though authority on earth has been granted to Satan, such power is not truly his by right. Therefore, God owes him nothing.

Moral Influence:

A third view of the atonement is that the death of Christ was perhaps nothing more than the ultimate expression of love. While the death of Christ certainly represents the greatest demonstration of love (Romans 5:8), to reduce the act to this one element is entirely inappropriate. Therefore, “Christ died for us”

does not mean He died to show us how to die, but rather, that He died in order that we would not.

Conclusion:

The atonement is a rich and complex doctrine and should be embraced in all of its splendor. We would certainly do well to see the wondrous truths of the many sides of the cross. However, to empty it of its primary glory, penal substitution, is to rob the Lord of the brilliant reflection of His work.

Pictures of Salvation

Like the atonement in particular, salvation in general has many different pictures which Scripture uses. We will discuss just four such pictures in this chapter.

Propitiation

Propitiation invokes ritualistic temple imagery to display the death of Christ. As the word originally points back to the “mercy seat,” it directs the reader to think of the cross as a sacrifice. Theologically, it entails the satisfaction of the divine wrath through the sacrifice of the Son.

- Romans 3:25a *whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith*
- 1 John 2:1-2 *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*
- 1 John 4:10 *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

Redemption

Redemption invokes marketplace imagery to display the death of Christ. This economic picture highlights a number of truths related to the cross. In dying in our place, Jesus has effectively redeemed us from: the curse of the law, the sinful flesh, death, futility, etc. As the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), Christ died to pay what we rightly owed. Our ransom has been paid.

- Mark 10:45 *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*
- 1 Timothy 2:5-6 *For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.*
- Galatians 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE”—*
- Ephesians 1:7 *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace...*

- Hebrews 9:12 *and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*

Justification

Justification invokes legal imagery to display the death of Christ. It is not the process of making us righteous, but rather it is a declaration of having Christ's righteousness imputed to us. Even beyond the scope of a criminal trial, we are declared not merely "not guilty" but even "just" through the work of the Son.

- Romans 3:21-28 *But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.*
- Romans 5:1-2 *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.*
- Romans 5:8-10 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that 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.*
- 1 Corinthians 6:11 *Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

Reconciliation

Reconciliation invokes household imagery to display the death of Christ. It involves the peace between God and man which was purchased by the death of the Son. Whereby we were once alienated and hostile toward God, by faith we are reconciled to Him as our heavenly Father.

- Romans 5:10-11 *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. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now*

received the reconciliation.

- Romans 11:15 *For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will {their} acceptance be but life from the dead?*
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all {these} things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*
- Ephesians 2:16 *and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.*

Conclusion:

As we have seen, salvation is a vast doctrine which many different nuances. We have been reconciled, justified and redeemed by the propitiatory, substitutionary death of the Son of God. In other articles, we can see how we enter into such a state.

Pertinent Scriptures:

- John 3:16-18 *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*
- Acts 4:12 *And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*
- Romans 10:9-13 *that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."*
- Ephesians 2:8-9 *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.*
- Titus 3:4-5 *But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 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...*
- Romans 1:16 *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 13:11 *Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.*