

## TS03.01 Introduction to the Concept of Salvation

### Personal Reflection:

#### In six words, what is salvation?

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When did you become a Christian? Do you remember why?

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Have your reasons for being a Christian changed since then?

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Two common evangelism methods suggest the goal of salvation can be described as “going to heaven when you die,” and the means of salvation as “believing Jesus died for me so that my sins can be forgiven.” The classic 18<sup>th</sup> century approach focuses more on “avoiding hell’s terrors when you die.” (Paraphrased as, turn or burn.)

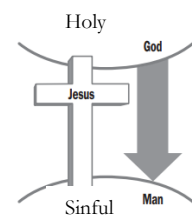
[Evangelism Explosion](#) (D. James Kennedy, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, FLA, USA; 1960s-)

- (1) Do you know for sure that you are going to be with God in Heaven?
- (2) If God were to ask you, “Why should I let you into My Heaven?” what would you say?

Explain: The dilemma is we've got God on one side, and He's not going to "just let you in," and we've got us on the other side, and we cannot save ourselves. But God solved this dilemma through the person of His son, Jesus Christ.

#### Four Spiritual Laws (Bill Bright, Campus Crusade for Christ, USA; 1959; >2.5 billion)

- (1) God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.
- (2) Man is sinful and separated from God, thus he cannot know and experience God's plan for life.
- (3) Jesus Christ is God's provision for man's sin through whom man can know God's love and plan for his life.
- (4) We must receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord by personal invitation.



This diagram illustrates that God has bridged the gulf that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins.

Sinner's Prayer: Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.

#### Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God (Sermon by Jonathan Edwards, Massachusetts, 1741; \$23 at Koorong)

[\[Wikipedia\]](#) This was a highly influential sermon of the Great Awakening, emphasizing God's wrath upon unbelievers after death to a very real, horrific, and fiery Hell. The underlying point is that God has given humans a chance to confess their sins. It is the mere will of God, according to Edwards, that keeps wicked men from being overtaken by the devil and his demons and cast into the furnace of Hell – "like greedy hungry lions, that see their prey, and expect to have it, but are for the present kept back [by God's hand]." Mankind's own attempts to avoid falling into the "bottomless gulf" due to the overwhelming "weight and pressure towards hell" are insufficient as "a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock". This act of grace from God has given humans a chance to believe and trust in Christ. Edwards provides much varied and vivid imagery to illustrate this main theme throughout.

## Jesus of Nazareth

Mark 1:14-15, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news [the gospel] of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.”

Mark 8:34, He called the crowd...and said to them, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Luke 10:25-28, A religious expert stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself.” And Jesus said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

John 10:10, Jesus said, My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. (NLT)

## The Apostle Paul

Romans 10:9-10, 13, If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved... For “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Ephesians 2:8-10, For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.

## The Early Church

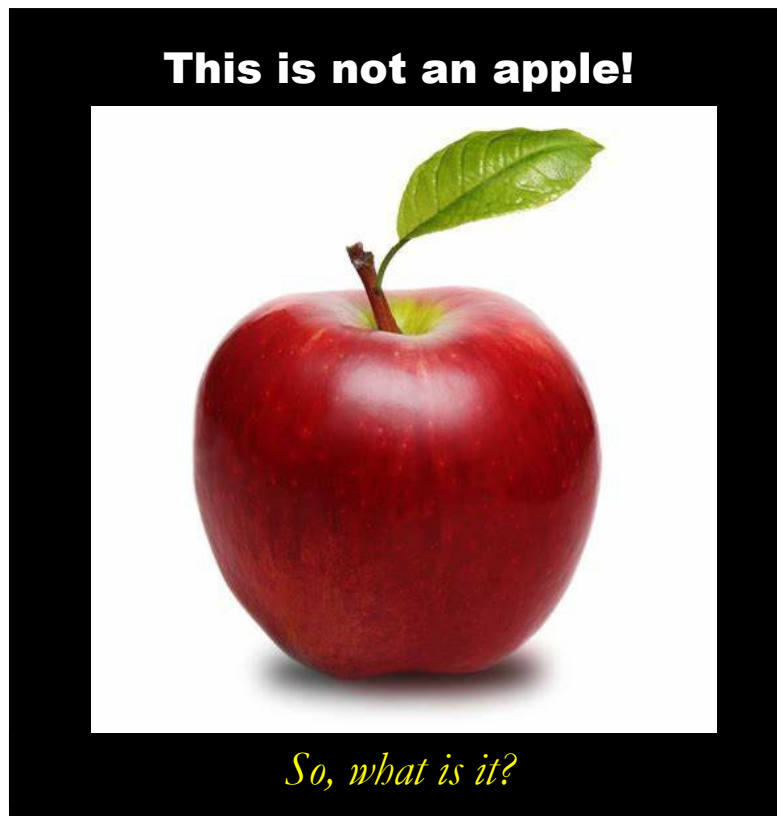
Acts 2:38, Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

James 2:14-17, What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

## Exploring the Meaning and Practice of Salvation

Over the next four weeks, we will be exploring **Soteriology (Gk. *soteria* + *logos*) – the doctrines of Salvation**. Yet, the goal of this study is not to increase our abstract, academic understanding of Christian doctrines. It is certainly not intended to equip us with a set of proof texts with which we can defeat all those who wrongly hold to doctrines different from us. The goal is to better understand the questions that have generated the doctrines of salvation – the What? Who? Why? When? Where? And, how? (5W1H) – and to explore answers that better help us to enter more faithfully into the narrative of Scripture and which deepen our love for God and lead us to increasing conformity to the image of God’s Son.

## (0) Prolegomena



- (1) The Bible is neither a book of doctrines nor a Systematic Theology textbook. It is written in narratives and epistles, all of which are context specific. The Bible is intended to help us know about God and, significantly, to know the living God and to grow (individually and collectively) into God's people. The Bible tells us stories of salvation and of people being saved. It does not offer a doctrine of salvation; rather, we must infer doctrines from the narratives.
- (2) The ancient Church has not established a single orthodox interpretation of salvation, neither the what nor the how. Historically, various doctrines of salvation have separated the Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Churches, and Protestant Churches (who mostly disagree with one another about one or all aspects of salvation). There are major competing theories of Atonement – how God reconciles us to himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus – e.g., Christus Victor, Ransom, Satisfaction (Honour), Moral Influence (Subjective), Penal Substitution (Debt), and other less influential views, including Relational.
- (3) Fortunately, we are not saved by our doctrinal purity. We are saved because God loves us, even while we are sinners – think of the Father's continuing love for his Prodigal Son. The effectiveness of salvation is in no way dependent on our capacity to understand the why or how of salvation. We are not saved by the doctrine of salvation. **We are not saved by a right understanding of the doctrine of salvation.**
- (4) Despite this, all too often, we have let our different understandings separate us into warring factions that deny the validity of the other's claim to being called true Christians. Can it really be true that among the "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands, who cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10), there are only Baptists – and only our particular type of Baptists! [\[insert joke here!\]](#)

- (5) As we read the Bible, in the context of the Church and our own lived experiences with God, we find ourselves seeking to better know God and understand his ways in order that we might better follow Jesus.

**Scripture**

**Tradition**

**Reason**

**Experience**

- (6) Exploring new ideas about Salvation does not make us guilty of sin or lead to doubt and a loss of faith – unless our faith is in the interpretation (doctrine) rather than in God and his actions! The goal of doing theology is not deconstruction of our faith but reconstruction; however, sometimes the former precedes the latter.
- (7) If there are so many different views, and it doesn't matter to our salvation if we get them mostly right or mostly wrong, why should we seek a better understanding of Salvation?
- (8) Our real goal should be to know God more deeply and to follow him more faithfully – worship and holiness. There are probably three things to consider in assessing the rightness of a particular doctrine. These three things are necessary (all three are required) and, probably, sufficient (no fourth test is necessary). (1) The doctrine arises thematically from the Bible. (2) It enhances the worship/love of the living God. And, (3) it leads to increasing conformity to the image of Jesus.

*Contemplation of the grand sweep of salvation ought to lift our hearts to praise the triune God, whose saving activity arises out of his immense love for us. Stan Grenz*

## (1) Introduction to Christian Teaching on Salvation

**Personal Reflection:** Jesus is the ANSWER, but what is the QUESTION?

**What are we saved from?**

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**What are we saved to?**

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Which question was easiest to answer?

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### The Universal Religious Idea of Salvation

“It could be argued reasonably that **the primary purpose of all religions is to provide salvation for their adherents**, and the existence of many different religions indicates that there are a great variety of opinions about what constitutes salvation and the means of achieving it.” (Brandon, *EncyBrit* 16:201).

- 1) A key factor in determining the nature of salvation is determining the nature of the problem(s) for which salvation is the answer. The what and how of salvation tends to be based upon our fundamental sense of what is wrong. We know that the world is not as it should be; we are not as we should be. We desire to be either rescued from it or, perhaps, to increasingly be able to overcome it.
  - a) A utopian view of life seems unrealistic, for we have all experienced loss and failure.
  - b) A nihilist or a fatalistic view seems inadequate and incomplete for we sense hope and possibilities.
- 2) In **Greco-Roman Religion** the concern was for salvation (safety, health, and success) in a chaotic world, not from possible judgement in the “after-life.” GR religion lacked any sense of morality and despite the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul, there was little interest in gaining passage to the afterlife. GR religions honoured the gods as (non-exclusive) patrons, rather than the exclusive worship of a personal deity.
- 3) **Buddhism**, for example, defines the problem as suffering, analyses the cause as loss, and offers a path of detachment. “It is human suffering that has determined the soteriological goal of Buddhism, which is characterized as how to obtain release from human suffering itself. In that way, ‘Buddhism is less a set of beliefs than a path, leading from suffering to the cessation of suffering, from ignorance to compassion and wisdom’ (Harris 2005:198). Therefore, deliverance from suffering (*dukkha*) is the ultimate goal of Buddhism that has determined the soteriological goal of Buddhism, which is characterized as how to obtain release from human suffering itself.” (R. Maeir, “[Salvation in Buddhism](#).”)
- 4) Christianity locates the source of the problem primarily within humans rather than primarily within their environment. This means that sin must be dealt with. Erickson describes the evangelical view, “the human’s basic deficiency is...separation from God.” Salvation is, therefore, primarily concerned with reconciliation with God, not just dealing with sin (e.g., justification, forgiveness, or “getting saved”). Note the description provided by R.E.O. White in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (s.v., “Salvation”),

What are we saved from? This includes sin and death; guilt and estrangement; ignorance of truth; bondage to habit and vice (i.e., freedom); fear of demons, of death, of life, of God, of hell; despair of self; alienation from others; pressures of the world; a meaningless life.

Paul's own testimony is almost wholly positive: salvation has brought him peace with God, access to God's favour and presence, hope of regaining the glory intended for men, endurance in suffering, steadfast character, an optimistic mind, inner motivations of divine love and power of the Spirit, ongoing experience of the risen Christ within his soul, and sustaining joy in God (Rom. 5:1-11).

Salvation extends also to society, aiming at realizing the kingdom of God; to nature, ending its bondage to futility (Rom. 8:19-20); and to the universe, attaining final reconciliation of a fragmented cosmos (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20).

- 5) Most Christians have an understanding of salvation that is too narrow. They are more concerned about what God does for them than about God's action in the world. But salvation is the story of how the Creator acts as Redeemer in order to achieve Restoration. **As such, salvation is a broad term embracing the totality of God's redemptive purposes – personal, social, and cosmic.** It begins with creation and includes the new world that God will make one day. It acknowledges that God's original intent has been frustrated by sin and evil. It continues with the creation of a new community – a people belonging to God – through the sacrifice of his own Son. And it leads on to the re-creation of a new heaven and a new earth. It includes the new life that God shares with us. God's kingdom – the Lordship of Jesus – will be established. We can be a part of that and we can have a part to play in the establishment of that kingdom.
- 6) NT Wright, argues that if God's final act of salvation is to gather "souls" to "heaven" after destroying the earth in judgement, then salvation is dressing up a devastating defeat as a victory.

If God's good creation...really is good, and if God wants to reaffirm that goodness in a wonderful act of new creation at the last, then to see the death of the body and the escape of the soul as 'salvation' is... **totally and utterly wrong**...As we have seen [in *Surprised by Hope* (2007)], the whole of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, speaks out against such nonsense. It is, however, what most western Christians, including most 'Bible Christians' of whatever sort, actually believe. This is a serious state of affairs, reinforced not only in popular teaching but in liturgies, public prayers, hymns and homilies of every kind.

### The Biblical Background of "Salvation"

- 1) **Salvation is a metaphor** built around the two basic thoughts of (1) deliverance from danger, distress, enemies; and (2) wholeness and health (i.e., *shalom*). In Scripture, a number of images are used for salvation: Healing, Redemption, Freedom from Slavery, Liberation through Ransom, Reconciliation, Peace with God, Forgiveness of Sin, and Justification.
- 2) **The Hebrew word, *יְשׁוּעָה* (*yeshu'ah*)**, most often associated with salvation in the OT includes the idea of (i) welfare, prosperity; (ii) deliverance; (iii) salvation by God, primarily from external evils, but often, with added spiritual idea; and (iv) victory. The NRSV translates this term in a number of different, but related, ways: salvation (Gen 49:18), peace (Gen 26:31), deliverance (Ex 14:13), victory (1 Sam 2:1), help (2 Sam 10:11), escape (2 Sam 15:14), and prosperity (Job 30:15).
- 3) **The Greek word *σῶζω* (*sōzō*)** is used 54x in the Gospels with 3 different meanings depending on context.
  - a) 14x - deliverance from disease or demon possession [Mt 9:21, 22; Mk 3:4; 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 10:52; Lu 6:9; 8:36, 48, 50; 17:19; 18:42; Jn 11:12]
  - b) 20x - rescue of physical life from some impending peril or death [Mt 8:25; 14:30; 16:25; 27:40, 42, 49; Mk 8:35; 15:30, 31; Lu 9:24, 56; 23:35, 37, 39; Jn 12:27]
  - c) 20x - spiritual salvation [Mt 1:21; 10:22; 19:25; 24:13, 22; Mk 8:35; 10:26; 13:13, 20; 16:16; Lu 7:50; 8:12; 9:24; 13:23; 18:26; 19:10; Jn 3:17; 5:34; 10:9; 12:47]
  - d) In the NT epistles there is less emphasis upon the present nature of salvation (e.g., healing, rescue) where the emphasis seems to be upon the future "salvation of our souls" (1 Pet 1:9).

- 4) However, *shalom* often carries the full flavours of meaning, in the same way the Hebrew word *shalom* can convey both physical and spiritual wellbeing.
  - a) Luke 7:50 But Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith [*pistis*] has saved [*shalom*] you; go in peace.”
  - b) Luke 8:48 Jesus said to her, “Daughter, your faith [*pistis*] has made you well [*shalom*]; go in peace.”
- 5) “Salvation is a broad concept in the Bible. A central theme, it covers everything from physical healing to the forgiveness of sins, from victory in battle to a new creation... Salvation is about everything that is involved in the coming blessing of God’s kingdom. Plainly a holistic definition is required. Salvation includes the healing of broken relationships – with God, with others, with nature. It includes the healing of persons, justice for the oppressed and stewardship of the natural world. It operates on many levels – spiritual, psychological, physical, economic, social and political. No aspect of the creation lies outside of God’s desire to bring restoration and wholeness. The church is called to participate in God’s saving activity on behalf of this world through its actions and prayers, to strive for justice and liberation for the oppressed in every sense and to keep hope alive in people for the culmination of salvation at the end of time” (Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love* 111-12).
  - a) Healing in the first century was not merely a physical event. A healed person was restored to their community and to their God.
- 6) In Scripture, salvation is spoken of as an event, a process, and a future goal.
  - a) PAST – we have been saved, Rom 8:24; Eph 2:5, 8; Titus 3:5-8
  - b) PRESENT – we are being saved, 1 Cor 1:18, 15:2; 2 Cor 2:15; 1 Pet 1: 9, 3:21
  - c) FUTURE – we will be saved, Rom 5:9-10, 13:11; 1 Cor 5:5; Phil 1:5-6, 2:12
- 7) PRESENT: The corporate goal of salvation. While there is plenty of evidence to support the New Testament’s interest in the salvation of the individual, we would do well to note the importance of salvation understood as referring to the fortunes of the nation of Israel. The dominant biblical image is concerned with God establishing a people for himself.
- 8) PRESENT: “Being saved undoubtedly means being forgiven, being spared from judgment, being renewed, indwelt and built up by the Holy Spirit on the basis of Christ’s finished work; but it also means assuming the mantle given to Adam, to live out a life that is aesthetically satisfying, ethically significant, and socially responsible in a world that is still God’s” (D. F. Wells, *The Search for Salvation* 45).
- 9) FUTURE: The cosmic goal of salvation. “The whole of the created order also comes under the Lordship of Jesus. He is the sovereign firstborn over all creation, for it was created through him and is sustained by him (Col 1:15-16, Heb 1:3)” (Lyon, *EDT*, 699). Note, Romans 8:22-23; Eph 1:10, and Rev 21:1.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:22-23).

It is God’s plan, in the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:10)

Is it possible that the strength and weakness of “The Prosperity Gospel” arises from its focus on an individualised version of present salvation?

## (2) Different Models of Salvation – Forensic v. Relational

### The Forensic (i.e., Judicial) Model – Justification

For many Christians it would not be possible to speak of salvation without using terms such as sin, guilt, forgiveness, grace, law, judge, judgment, punishment, or heaven and hell. These words are all biblical words, but they gain their meaning from the framework within which they are placed. Commonly, in our part of the Church, that are fitted into an impersonal Western Courtroom Model. This has become for many Protestant Christians the only way of understanding God's salvation.



In the forensic model of Salvation, sin is a failure to always keep all aspects of God's holy Law, which renders each one of us guilty and rightly sentenced to eternal death (which is experienced as eternal a punishment). In God's mercy, he agreed to be satisfied by the Sacrifice of his only Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for our sins.

In the classic 11<sup>th</sup> century answer to the question, *Cur Deus Homo?* [Why did God become a Man?], Anselm argued that only man owed the debt to God's honour, but only God could pay it. So, our salvation is achieved by the death of the sinless Jesus. Jesus, as the sinless one, did not deserve to die and so his death is uniquely an act of obedience that exceeded the honour required to be offered to God. This superabundance of honour must be rewarded. Jesus uses the Father's reward to satisfy the Father's righteous wrath against humanity's disobedience. This reward, however, is only applied to those who in repentance and faith accept Jesus as their Saviour (and Lord). This is still the most common way for Roman Catholics to describe the basis of our salvation.

The **Penal Substitution Theory**, which for many Evangelical Christians is the ONLY right way to understand how God saves us, is a modification of Anselm's Satisfaction Theory. On the basis of our sins, divine justice demands that we be sentenced to death (hence, "penal"), but in the Father's great mercy, Jesus, the Son of God, dies our death on the cross in our place (hence, "substitution"). A popular exponent of the Penal Substitution Theory explains it this way. "Penal substitution is not some kind of optional issue. You've got a massive problem if God just says, 'Hey, you're forgiven.' The character of God would be called into question as to His integrity, His holiness, His virtue, His righteousness, and His perfection. God is so pure and holy that He will punish every single sin ever committed by every person, either in that person or in the substitute for that person. That is the purest heart of Christianity and soteriology."

However, it might be argued that God requires us to forgive freely and without demanding "satisfaction." In fact, we are unlikely to consider a debt that is "paid" as having been "forgiven." And, in this description of the character of God, why does God's love, which is the eternal essence of God, not get mentioned? It is not self-evident that justice is served (or demonstrated) when an innocent person is punished for another person's crime. Is it possible that the Parable of the Prodigal's Father offers a better model of salvation – coming home.

### What makes sin sinful? Why can't sin "just" be forgiven?

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Satisfaction Theory: defrauding God of the honour he is due (e.g., feudal Lord or mafia Godfather)

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Penal Substitution: an individual's affront to justice that must be punished (e.g., the Law or God's holiness)

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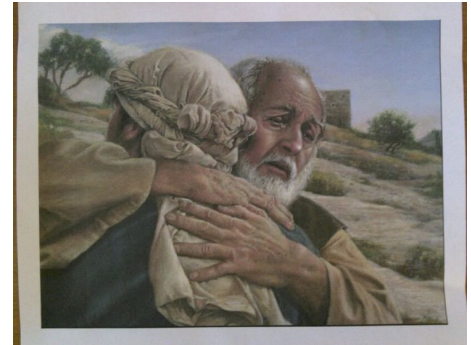
### What is the sin of the Prodigal son? How is it punished?

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### The Participationist / Union with Christ / Theosis / Relational Model

Stan Grenz discusses salvation within the section of his theology devoted to the Spirit. This captures his emphasis upon salvation as the process by which the Spirit applies Christ's work to individuals in order to bring "us into union with the Lord and with each other in Christ's community... [S]alvation is one divine act, the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us into full conformity with the likeness of Christ." This highlights salvation as a process with a relational goal.



If we start with a conviction that love not just a characteristic (or an act) of God, rather it is the eternal essence of the Triune God, who is Love, and that this love is participation in open, mutual enveloping relationships (of Father, Son, and Spirit), then it is likely that we will frame salvation differently.

Sin is not an infraction against the honour of our feudal Lord (as with Anslem's Satisfaction Theory)) or a crime against the impersonal law of God (as with Penal Substitution Theory), **sin is a brake in the relationship with the God who loves us**. Each sin furthers the breach in our relationship with God until, in our rebellion against our loving Father, we are living in a pigsty far from home. That is, sin contains its own punishment!

But God, despite his broken heart, never stops loving us and his love calls us home. When we accept the offer to come home, we are met with forgiveness (always existing, but previously not experienced) and we are restored as children of God, under the care and protection of the father. The great hurt of our estrangement is a pain that the Father does not inflict on us; rather, this deep pain is worn in the Father's broken heart.

**Salvation is a *relationship*** that is initiated (=conversion), grown (=sanctification), and consummated (=glorification). That is, it has a past, a present and a future component each of which are essential to the reality of true salvation.

I have found the Eastern understanding of salvation, described by use of the Greek term *theosis*, to be particularly useful in coming to terms with the biblical reality of salvation. *Theosis*, referred to in English by the Latin terms divinization or deification, suggests the experience of being united with/in God, that is, to participate in the *koinonia* (fellowship) of the Triune God. This concept of participating in the life of God suggests to me that the dominant model of salvation should be a relational one.

Once we have grasped salvation as the process of being united with God then a number of problems disappear.

- a) One example of this is the problem of "easy believism" that has become prevalent in the modern evangelical church. Jesus has saved me. My sins are forgiven. Therefore, discipleship is optional for "I am saved by grace through faith alone." However, being united with God means living and walking with God in the present, that is, discipleship is an integral part of salvation.
- b) Another example is the problem of evangelism and social action, which one should take precedence over the other? If salvation means union with God then the gospel is something that is lived, not just something that is believed. Being saved means being caught up in the person *and work* of God. God's desire to extend his kingdom (or, better, to re-establish his kingdom) is our desire. Our community life will reflect the transforming life of God and we will be salt and light to the world. Who we are, not just what we believe, is changed by being saved.

Salvation is not a state of being into which we enter but a relationship that we become a part of. Hence, holiness, worship, and kingdom living are all a part of salvation.

Bad soteriology has led to bad evangelism. The salvation we have offered to people has been a substandard one. We have not clearly expressed the call to union with God nor have we clearly called upon people to count the cost of union with God. Bad evangelism has led to immature churches and this, in turn, has led to the churches losing their prophetic power as communities of the saved.

## Salvation: A Prayer

Lover of my soul, I have heard you call, and I have awoken to a new life.

I have encountered your Spirit, and I received an abundant life.

I have felt your gracious embrace, and I have entered into the dance of the divine Triune fellowship, which no mortal could dare dream of as obtainable.

A cacophony of colour envelops me in each timeless moment of togetherness.

- My beloved is mine, and I am his (Sol 2:16) – and his banner over me is love (2:4)
- Christ in me, the hope of glory (Col 1:27).
- Me in Christ, dweller in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).

I share now in the eternal life of God, a life without beginning or ending of boundary.

- Now I know in part, but soon I will see face to face and then I shall know, even as I am fully known (1Co 13:12).
- In humbleness, I will walk with the Ruler and Judge where he walks. Therefore, I commit myself this day, and each day, to act for justice and to love mercy – just as he does in all of his ways (Mic 6:8).
- In humbleness, I will serve the Creator and Redeemer in his mission. Therefore, I commit myself this day, and each day, to serve as his ambassador for reconciliation, making known to all that today is the day of salvation (1Co 5:20, 6:2).

Hold me close in your life, so that I might live close to your heart and your ways.

Amen.