Salvation: Cosmic Implications

**Purpose**
1. Focus on salvation through Christ alone.
2. Show that salvation is more than forgiveness of sin.
3. Document that salvation has cosmic implications.

**Summary**

God takes the initiative in the plan of salvation: It is not something earned by humans, but a gift made available to all humans. It is a gift planned before creation. Salvation is worked out in human history in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (supplied), and worked out in human lives (applied). The application (see chapter 14) has been made throughout human history, for Christ is “the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8b). The plan includes Christ’s present ministry as King-Priest in heaven’s sanctuary, His second advent, glorification of His followers, and their ascension to heaven. It also involves a new creation of the earth and its environs, and life in the new earth that will never end. The plan is paradise regained after paradise was lost through the fall of humans (Gen. 3:1–6). It took God to become also human (chapter 9), and as a human, to work out in His human life a character to give to His followers, as well as a death to atone for their sins. But there is more. Salvation transcends what God does for humans. It involves the entire cosmos. Salvation’s plan is prior to human creation (Eph. 1:3–14), and extends beyond
human restoration, for it involves resolution of the cosmic controversy, so that sin will never arise again (Rev. 21:1–5a; 22:1–5). ¹ The above is the scope of the full mission of Jesus Christ. Salvation includes all that the Persons of the Trinity do for intelligent created beings, as an outworking of their inner-Trinitarian love.

**Outline**

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   B. New Testament

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III. Conclusion

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**Introduction**

With this chapter we begin a new segment on salvation (chapters 12–15). I concur with Millard Erickson that salvation is a point of transition in a theological system, moving from the objective (God, sin, Christ) to the subjective (application to our lives, which affects the doctrines of the church and final things).² It follows that our understanding of the Trinity (as a relational God) affects our understanding of salvation. One purpose of Christ’s mission on earth was to reveal what God is like (John 14:9)—which indicates how important Christ’s mission was through His life, teachings, and death. He continues to

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¹. I will have more to say on this topic in my *Systematic Theology*, volume 4, which deals with eschatology.
reveal what God is like in the application of salvation through the Holy Spirit, and His intercession on behalf of humans in heaven’s sanctuary.

The church worked out the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of Christ, but never worked out the doctrine of salvation. In fact, “people can profess almost any view of the atonement without branding themselves as heretical.”3 It follows that despite “the centrality of the cross from the earliest days of the church, there has never been agreement on the way the cross saves us.”4 “In pre-Reformation theology scant justice is done to soteriology in general. It does not constitute a separate locus, and its constituent parts are discussed under other rubrics, more or less as disjecta membra [disconnected parts]. Even the greatest of the Schoolmen, such as Peter the Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, pass on at once from the discussion of the incarnation to that of the Church and the sacraments.”5

Catholic theology locates salvation in the church, rather than in Jesus Christ. This does not mean Christ is not the Savior, but means His salvation is found only through the church. Even Protestant sacramental theology is in danger of depending on the sacraments instead of solely depending on the Savior. Anything that comes between Christ and His followers questions Christ as the only mediator between God and humans.

It is important to realize that the life, death, resurrection, and present ministry of Christ in heaven’s sanctuary have everything to do with human salvation, and the resolution of the cosmic controversy so that rebellion will never rise again (Rev. 21:1–5a; 22:1–5). Yale historian Jaroslav Pelikan has said:

> The Creed adopted at Nicea confessed that it had been “for the sake of us men and for the purpose of our salvation” that Christ “came down [from heaven] and was made flesh, was made man, suffered, was raised on the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge living and dead.” But neither it nor later dogmas specified in any detail just how the salvation which was the purpose of Christ’s coming was related to these events in his earthly and heavenly states.6

It needs to be kept in mind that sin began in heaven, not on earth (Rev. 12:7–8). God’s response to human sin is called salvation, but His response to sin involves more than the human race. When Lucifer sinned in heaven, God didn’t snuff him out. If God had destroyed Lucifer, created beings would have served God out of fear. So God’s judgment was held back, as He allowed sin to reveal itself over time. Sin is rebellion against God and misrepresents His character to the universe. But how can God be loving when He allows sin to cause suffering to so

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4. Ibid., 11.
many? God knows He needs to reveal His justice and love, and so He sends Christ into the world, not only to save humans, but to reveal the character of God (John 14:9). Sin deserves and demands justice be exercised against it. That judgment that Christ takes upon Himself (2 Cor. 5:21) is a righteous act, and in so doing He acts in love (John 3:16). Justice and mercy meet at the Cross, revealing the character of God in an unparalleled way. In this chapter, we will see that this has cosmic implications, far beyond the salvation of humans.

Salvation flows out of God’s eternal and comprehensive plan (see my Systematic Theology, volume 2, chapter 8), which involves the eternal covenant that unfolds in history (volume 2, chapters 9–11), and encompasses redemption through the life and death of Jesus Christ (chapter 9) and restoration through the high-priestly ministry of the risen Christ in heaven’s sanctuary (chapter 10), and application through the Holy Spirit (now called “the Spirit of Christ,” 1 Pet. 1:11; chapter 14). Salvation requires understanding the nature of sin (chapter 3), the function of the law (this chapter), and the relationship between justification and sanctification (chapters 15–16). In summary, salvation is rooted or grounded in the “pact of salvation” (pactum salutis) of the Trinity (which I call the Covenant of Redemption and Restoration), and thus in their eternal reciprocal love. Their plan to redeem humans and restore the cosmos to its pre-Fall state was a plan made prior to human creation, which is worked out in human history through the everlasting covenant (embracing old and new covenants), through the Father’s giving of His Son, the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation in Scripture

All non-Christian religions emphasize the teaching of their leader, not what the leader has done for them, for leaders do not save them. The teaching is about how they can earn their own salvation. One method of salvation is enlightenment (gaining knowledge) through meditation and mantra recitations, a system of rigorous and arduous works that may take a lifetime; another method is samsura, or multiple reincarnations that take numerous lifetimes to overcome karma in order to arrive at the goal of salvation. By contrast, Christ’s central teaching is His atoning death sacrifice in place of humans, for “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a). Salvation is God’s gift through Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and present intercession in heaven’s sanctuary and His resurrection of the saints and their glorification at the Second Advent; and hence any attempt to earn it by human works is an utter waste of time—because it is both impossible and unnecessary.