

THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE: SOTERIOLOGY

THE PURPOSE, PLAN AND METHOD OF GOD



Soteriology (Thiessen, 1949) is the Biblical doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ and God's plan for the salvation of mankind through His Son. This includes the entire scope of Jesus Christ, from His pre-incarnate state (before being born as a human being), His short life on Earth, through His ascension to heaven and His ultimate return.

THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

This document is the third in a series of articles on Soteriology. We saw that Jesus' mission to the Earth was to become a man and represent God the Father to a sinful world and introduce us to God so that we would repent and gain eternal life. To complete His mission, He had to die so that there could be atonement for the sin of man. This week we look at the death of Jesus Christ and why His death and resurrection are so important.

The death of Jesus Christ is mentioned as a fact in the Old Testament long before He even came to the Earth as the Word. All of the Old Testament sacrifices point towards the final sacrifice that had to be made for man. It is just as important in the New Testament where some 20 percent of the gospel writings are devoted to the crucifixion. To die on the cross was the very reason there was an incarnation in the first place. The word "gospel" means good news, and what good news it is today! Knowing that your sins can be forgiven through faith and because of the death of somebody else is not found in any other religion. In this regard, Christianity differs from all other religions.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is fundamental to our salvation. Without these acts, there is no salvation. We may think that the theme of His death is only relevant on the Earth, but it is equally important in heaven.

While there are many unbiblical views about the death of Jesus Christ, let us rather focus on the true meaning of His death. The prophet Isaiah writes that God the Father was willing to let His Son die and Jesus died a **vicarious** death on our behalf:

¹⁰Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. – **Isaiah 53:10**

Firstly, the death of Jesus Christ was not for His own sake, but for others, for us, the entire world:

⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. – **Isaiah 53:5**

This prophecy is referred to by Paul:

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. – **Romans 5:8**

John's take on this is probably the one with the most feeling:

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. –
John 15:13

The second aspect to note about the death of Jesus Christ was that it was brought about to satisfy God's requirement for holiness, and sin cannot be tolerated in the presence of holiness. Man's sin separated him from God and there would be only one way to reconcile man to God.

²³For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; – **Romans 3:23-25**

In addition, the law of God had to be **satisfied**. Transgressing a law leads to a penalty, and in our case the penalty is death. However, God planned, knowing that it was impossible for man to pay any penalty and be justified. Therefore, in order to avoid death as required, there had to be a substitution.

³For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: ⁴That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. – **Romans 8:3-4**

Christ's death also brings **atonement**. In the Old Testament, atonement was made by the priest, by representing the nation before God and then they would be forgiven. However, this had to be repeated every year. The atonement that Jesus Christ made for us does not need to be repeated.

¹¹But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; ¹²Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. – **Hebrews 9:11-12**

Propitiation is the act of appeasing. Through His death, Jesus Christ appeased the wrath of God. His wrath was the result of man's sin.

²And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. – **1 John 2:2**

Lastly, the death of Jesus Christ brought **reconciliation**. In accountancy terms, reconciliation is the process of balancing the books, to put it in the most basic of terms. The positives and negatives have to be balanced so that the deficit is 0.

¹⁰For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. – **Romans 5:10**

The New Testament often describes the death of Jesus Christ as a **ransom** that had to be paid. A ransom is the price paid to release or set free something or someone else. Jesus clearly stated that He had come to give His life as a ransom to many.

²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. – **Matthew 20:28**

We must remember that this ransom was not paid to the devil as he has no authority over the lives of men, but it was paid to God the Father. In this way, we are redeemed from the penalty of sin and from the curse of the law.

¹³Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: – **Galatians 3:13**

WHO DID CHRIST DIE FOR?

Many often ask whether Christ died for the entire world or just for the elect. If He died for all, then why are not all men automatically saved? If He died only for the elect, is it not then unfair towards those outside the faith? One part of the answer is described my Matthew:

²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. – **Matthew 20:28**

From this verse it is clear that **many** does not mean **all**. Jesus Himself distinguishes between many and all:

⁹I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. – **John 17:9**

He does not pray for the world but only for those that were given to Him – the disciples, their followers, and believers of all ages to come.

However, the same gospel writer records the words of John the Baptist who indicates that Jesus came for all mankind – the world, including believers and unbelievers.

²⁹The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. – **John 1:29**

The death of Jesus paved the way for all to be forgiven on condition that they accept the offer, and not all will. It is indeed very sad that in a world where the believer is called to be light, that even when they are light, the unbelieving world prefers to ignore the light and walk in darkness.

God's forgiveness is available to all, but applies only to those that have accepted it.

Bibliography

Thiessen, H. C., 1949. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. 3rd Edition ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company.