

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 HOLY SPIRIT

While on the Earth Jesus promised the disciples that after His departure, He would not let them on their own, but would send the Holy Spirit to remain with them forever.

The Holy Spirit is fully God, is part of the Trinity and is a Person. Personal pronouns are used to describe Him. He is not a spirit; He is *the* Spirit. How does the work of the Holy Spirit relate to the salvation of man? How does His work relate to the world and to Jesus Christ?

IN CREATION

The work of the Holy Spirit in terms of the entire world is seen first in creation and the preservation thereof. We first read of the Holy Spirit when Genesis describes in chapter 1:

²And the **Spirit of God** moved upon the face of the waters. – **Genesis 1:2**

From the first time we read of the creation of the Earth, the Holy Spirit was involved. Many descriptions relate to the Holy Spirit breathing on people and breathing life into them.

⁶By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. – **Psalms 33:6**

The Holy Spirit is also responsible for the preservation of creation. This is seen in Isaiah:

⁷The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: – **Isaiah 40:7**

The Trinity never operate in isolation and the verse is clear the Holy Spirit is tasked with acting in the lives of every person.

The Holy Spirit **restrains evil** and we see this Paul's letter to the Thessalonians in which he outlines what is going to happen in the last days:

⁶And now ye know what **withholdeth** him that he might be revealed in his time. – **2 Thessalonians 2:6**

When you read the text in its context, starting with verse one through 8, we see that it is the Holy Spirit that currently prevents the evil of the coming antichrist to be revealed. Once the rapture has removed the church, the work of the Holy Spirit will cease, although He will still

be present, since God is omnipresent. Once he does not convince man of their sin anymore, the evil coming from man knows no bounds.

IN THE REVELATION OF THE BIBLE

The Holy Spirit is the author of the Word of God and is also the interpreter to man so that we can understand the written or preached Word. While it is true that the Bible was written by people, and they had their own style of writing, using their own known experience, the Holy Spirit moved them to write and thus there are no errors in the Bible as recorded originally. That there are mistakes found in various translations today, is because those mistakes were made either unknowingly, usually due to language differences which are acceptable, or intentionally, which is the result of twisting the truth. Paul tells Timothy that the entire Word of God was inspired by the Holy Spirit:

¹⁶All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. – **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

Peter tells how men were moved by the Spirit who spoke from God:

²⁰Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. ²¹For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. – **2 Peter 1:21**

The Holy Spirit ensures that the Word of God is understood by man. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us a spirit of wisdom. We do not get to understand the Word if it were not for the Holy Spirit working in our lives, even when we unbelievers.

IN THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

It is evident that Jesus Christ never acted on His own or in isolation. In everything He said or did, the Father and the Holy Spirit were present, represented and inferred. First, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit:

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child **of the Holy Ghost**. – **Matthew 1:18**

The Holy Spirit anointed Him at His baptism and at the same time, the Father spoke from heaven:

¹⁶And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the **Spirit of God descending like a dove**, and lighting upon him:
¹⁷And lo a voice from heaven, saying, **This is my beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased. – **Matthew 3:16-17**

The Holy Spirit was implied when His words on the cross were that He gave his Spirit over to the Father:

¹¹But if **the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead** dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. – **Romans 8:11**

¹⁴How much more shall the blood of Christ, **who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God**, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? – **Hebrews 9:14**

Before His ascension, He told the disciples that once He had gone to heaven, **He would send the Holy Spirit** to be with the disciples, and indeed all believers, forever:

⁷Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; **but if I depart, I will send him unto you.** – **John 16:7**

He also breathed on the disciples and they received the Holy Spirit:

²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: – **John 20:21**

IN THE LIVES OF UNBELIEVERS

The Holy Spirit also works in the lives of unbelievers, which we all were at some point. He convicts the unbeliever of their sin. Without this conviction, there would be no way the unbeliever could be aware of their sin. The Holy Spirit works in the lives of unbelievers when they are still hardened sinners. Jesus tells His disciples that the Holy Spirit will testify of Him. John states that Jesus was the true light that enlightens man, aware of his sin, to turn to the Saviour:

⁹That was the true Light, which **lighteth every man** that cometh to the world. – **John 1:9**

IN THE LIVES OF BELIEVERS

It is impossible for a believer not to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. The gift that Jesus left for us is His Holy Spirit that He said would be with us forever.

AT THE TIME OF CONVERSION

The Holy Spirit **convinces** the fallen man of his sin.

⁷Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. ⁸And when he is come, he will **reprove** the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹Of sin, because they believe not on me; ¹⁰Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; ¹¹Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. – **John 16:7-11**

When this person accepts his fallen state and repents, the Holy Spirit **regenerates** him.

⁴But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, ⁵Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of **regeneration**, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; ⁶Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; ⁷That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. – **Titus 3:4-7**

Once we have been regenerated, the Holy Spirit **fills** our lives, and **lives** within us. We become a temple of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he **dwelleth** with you, and shall be **in** you. – **John 14:17**

The Holy Spirit **baptises** us into the body of Jesus Christ, the church:

¹¹I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall **baptize** you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: ¹²Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. – **Matthew 3:11-12**

Finally, the Holy Spirit **seals** us. To be sealed means that we are kept pure and reserved and children of God, saved by grace and through faith. We have the security that we are owned by God and that eternal life is guaranteed:

¹³In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were **sealed** with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. – **Ephesians 1:13-14**

THE ONGOING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

During our lives, the Holy Spirit **fills** us:

¹⁷Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be **filled** with the Spirit; ¹⁹Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; ²⁰Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. – **Ephesians 5:17-21**

He **guides** and **leads** us:

¹⁶This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸But if ye be **led** of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. – **Galatians 5:16-18**

He **teaches** us:

²⁰But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye **know** all things.

²⁷But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing **teacheth** you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. – **1 John 2:20** and **27**

He **empowers** the believer to overcome the onslaughts of the devil:

¹³For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. – **Romans 8:13**

The Holy Spirit gives us **spiritual gifts**:

⁴Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. ⁷But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. ⁸For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; ⁹To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; ¹⁰To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: ¹¹But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. ¹²For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. – **1 Corinthians 12:4-13**

Finally, He **intercedes** for us with the Father:

²⁸Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh **intercession** for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. – **Romans 8:26**

CONCLUSION

This concludes our study on the introduction to soteriology. We have looked at the preincarnate Christ; who then came in the flesh as man; who died for the sins of all people; and promised never to leave us on our own, but sent His Holy Spirit to be with us forever.

Some parts of the discussion briefly touched on the topics of **conversion, regeneration, justification, sanctification** and **perseverance**. Each of these will be studied in more detail in the next lessons.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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