

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

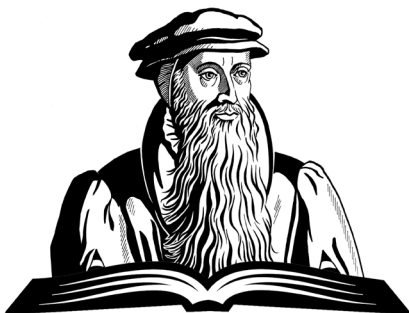
*Module 5:*

**SOTERIOLOGY—**

**THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION**

*Lecture 1*

**INTRODUCTION**



**The John Knox Institute**  
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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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### *Module 5 ~ The Doctrine of Salvation*

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2. The Doctrine of Union with Christ
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## *Module 5 ~ Lecture 1*

### **Introduction**

Which is worth more: a container of water, or a container full of gold coins? I suspect that you'll say the latter—the gold coins. Water is inexpensive or free, because there's lots of it, and it's easy to obtain, whereas gold is rare and more valuable to most people. But what we value can change with our context. For example, what if you were stranded in the desert without any water for two days, and you came across someone with a container of water. Well, you have no other access to water, and your life depends on getting it. In such circumstances, most people would gladly exchange all their gold for that container of water.

The natural man focuses on his body, and ignores his soul. Unbelievers place great value on the perishing things of this world, and give little thought to the worth of their soul. In Mark 8, verses 36 and 37, Jesus said, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" When the Holy Spirit begins to work in a sinner—convicting them of sin, exposing their desperate circumstances, showing the weight of eternity, and the judgment to come—everything they value begins to change. Now they value the salvation of their soul more than anything else in the entire world. God's provision of redemption, to reconcile sinners to himself becomes beautiful and of the greatest worth to them. Who can estimate the worth of the salvation of a single soul?

This series of seven modules, or courses, takes us through an introductory study of Systematic Theology. In the opening lectures of the first module, we provided an overview of the scope and purpose of these seven courses. The first module covered First Principles, or the Doctrine of Scripture. The second module covered the Doctrine of God. The third module addressed the Doctrine of Man, and the fourth module explored the Doctrine of Christ. The scope of this fifth module explores what the Bible teaches about salvation.

What we learned from Scripture about God leads us to a right understanding of man, and true knowledge of man's condition demonstrates his need for Christ—all that Christ is, all that he's done. Christ's person and work secures salvation for God's elect people. Well, what does that salvation include? Well, if you wish to gain a deeper understanding of salvation, these lectures aim to benefit you.

The lectures in this fifth module on the Doctrine of Salvation are, like the others, introductory, not exhaustive, and they're intended to furnish you with a foundation that you can build upon in your further studies. As you'll recall from the first module, theology, broadly defined, has to do with the study of the knowledge of God, and all that he has revealed for us to believe and do. We noted that it is the doctrine of living unto God through Christ, thus addressing both our thinking and our living. The Doctrine of Salvation, therefore, is an indispensable component to Systematic

Theology. We'll learn, for example, about union with Christ, effectual calling, regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and assurance. But in this first lecture, we'll consider a general introduction to the doctrine.

And so, we'll begin, as we always do, by considering a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the Doctrine of Salvation. We read in Romans 8, verse 30, "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Romans 8 opens with the truth that there is no condemnation for those in Christ, and it closes with the assertion that there is no separation from the love of God in Christ. In the section before verse 30, Paul is addressing the need that God's people have for encouragement and support in their earthly sufferings, adversities, and trials. He points to the hope of glory that is to come, and God's purposes of love in the present. He goes on in verses 28 and 29 to point to the eternal counsel of God. His purpose, as verse 28 says, is explained by his foreknowledge and predestination, as we see in verse 29. And that foreknowledge and predestination we explored in the second module on Systematic Theology. Verse 30 shows how God's eternal predestination is brought to pass in time, in the life of his redeemed people, through calling, justification, and glorification.

We can think of God's salvation of the elect as planned, purchased, and applied—planned, purchased, and applied. The plan is seen in his predestination—God's plan. The purchase is seen in Christ's atonement, his coming, and the work that he carries out to atone for the sins of his people. The application is seen in sinners being brought to Christ and reconciled to God. Paul speaks of the application of salvation in the words that we see in verse 30—calling, justification, and glorification. Notice that all three are divine actions. God calls, God justifies, God glorifies, just as God predestines.

Well, we also see that there is an order—called, justified, glorified. In other words, verse 30 describes a sequence in the application of salvation. Here he only mentions three of the elements, but this abbreviated list touches high points in the salvation of sinners. God calls a person before he justifies him, and he justifies a person before he glorifies him. The calling is first in order, and glorification, which belongs to the future, comes last in the application of salvation. Justification, featured in the middle, follows calling, and precedes glorification. So this principle of order or sequence will become important in what we will consider later in this lecture.

Well, this introduces us to the overarching Doctrine of Salvation. We'll build on what we learn in Romans 8, verse 30, and set forth the big picture of how the various components of the Doctrine of Salvation fit together.

So secondly, we will consider a doctrinal exposition of this introductory material. In *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 8, paragraph 8, we read these words: "To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey; and governing their hearts by his word and Spirit, overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation." The word "salvation" presupposes that we need to be delivered from something, and it's true. We need to be delivered, or saved, from sin. We need to be delivered, or saved, from hell. In a sense, we need to be delivered, or saved, from God, that is, the punishment of God's wrath. And the Bible uses many words to describe salvation as a whole. It will speak of redemption—the idea of God buying back a people for himself. It will speak of reconciliation—those who were alienated,

God and the sinner, being brought from enemies to friendship and fellowship. It speaks of deliverance—being delivered from sin, and hell, and so on. All of these are examples of words that describe salvation as a whole.

But you should note that in *Westminster Confession*, chapter 8, paragraph 8, which we quoted, notice that it distinguishes “redemption accomplished” on one hand, and “redemption applied” on the other. The former, “redemption accomplished,” or “purchased,” as the Confession says, refers to what was covered in Module 4, that series of lectures on the person and work of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, coming to atone for the sins of his people, his work both in his humiliation and exaltation. And he did so through his incarnation, crucifixion, his death and burial, his resurrection and ascension, his giving of his Spirit. This decisive work of Christ in redemptive history is the distinct act upon which the individual’s salvation rests. All of this refers to the redemption accomplished by Christ. Redemption applied refers to the individual sinner being brought into a state of salvation. Now this is important. It marks the transition from Christ’s work for us, to Christ’s work in us. So that the first, Christ’s work for us, is outside of the believer in the past, what Christ did. The second is inside the believer, Christ’s work in us. So the historical accomplishment of Christ’s redemption is final and not repeated—he’s gone to heaven. But it is applied in the life history of individual believers over and over throughout time. And this constitutes part of his ongoing work. So, in this series of lectures, which is entitled, “The Doctrine of Salvation,” we will be focusing on redemption applied—the application of salvation; the benefits that flow from what Christ purchased in his work of redemption. So that’s an important distinction and clarification

Furthermore, the Bible teaches that the application of salvation to a sinner consists of several elements. So for example, their effectual calling, their regeneration, their conversion, their justification, their sanctification, perseverance, and more. And so, in considering the application of salvation as a whole, we should begin by understanding how these various components fit together. As we noted earlier, in Romans 8, the Bible teaches an order, or a logical sequence, in which sinners receive salvation from God. Theologians call this the “order of salvation.” The Latin phrase is *ordo salutis*—order of salvation. This is the temporal order, or the order in time, of causes and effects through which salvation comes to the sinner. And so the question is, What is the order? What is the order that the Bible teaches? And the Biblical and Reformed answer is the following. You may want to write this down. Each of these are components of the application of salvation.

So the sequence is, first of all, calling—the calling of the elect. Secondly, that’s followed by regeneration—the regeneration of the elect. After regeneration comes faith and repentance. Faith and repentance are two sides of one coin, if you will. So when we speak of conversion, conversion consists of two things: faith and repentance. So calling is followed by regeneration, which is followed by faith and repentance. And after that, in the order of sequence, comes justification—the justification of God’s people. After that comes adoption, and then next, we have sanctification, and then lastly, the glorification of God’s people, which happens at the consummation at the end of history. So this is an order or sequence in which salvation is applied to the individual believer.

Now we saw in Romans 8, verse 30, an abbreviated summary of this order or sequence—there were just three things: calling, justification, and glorification. But in considering the rest of the Bible, we can begin to put some of the other pieces together. So for example, regeneration precedes faith—it comes before faith. God brings, he regenerates a sinner before they believe. In Ephesians 2, verse 1, it says, “And you hath he quickened”—or made alive—“who were dead in trespasses and sins.” Well, dead men can’t believe. Dead men can’t do anything that is spiritually good, as we see in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 14 and following. And so, in regeneration, God comes, and he

takes away the heart of stone, and he gives unto the sinner a heart of flesh, and he renews their wills. We must be “born again”—which is part of regeneration—in order to believe. Regeneration is the commencement of all saving grace in us. Faith signifies the first exercise of the gracious disposition implanted in regeneration. As we see in 1 John, being born of God produces fruit—1 John 3, verse 9; chapter 2, verse 29; chapter 4, verse 7; chapter 5, verses 4 and 18; and we could give many other examples. So here, we’re seeing that, yes, there is a sequence—regeneration has to come before faith.

And then next, we learn that faith must precede justification. Well, why is that? Well, because the Bible says we’re justified by faith. We learn that all the way back in Genesis 15, verse 6; we see it in Galatians 2, verse 16; or you can read all of Galatians 3, or Romans 4. Faith is clearly a prerequisite to justification, in the sense that it is the instrument by which we receive Christ’s imputed righteousness. So you have to have faith in order to lay hold of and rest upon Christ for justification. So the Bible’s teaching us faith comes before justification. Similarly, John 1, verse 12 teaches us that faith is prior to adoption as well, and for similar reasons.

Next, we can learn that justification precedes, or comes before, sanctification. So justification is an act of God’s free grace. It is a one time, never repeated act that God does, in bringing a sinner into a position of acceptance and access before God, through imputing his righteousness—Christ’s righteousness—to him, among other things. Sanctification is an ongoing work of God’s grace and Spirit, which takes the justified believer and conforms them more and more in the likeness of Jesus Christ. In sanctification, the believer is dying unto sin and living unto righteousness. The Holy Spirit is transforming them in their spiritual maturity. And so sanctification is built upon justification. Sanctification flows from justification. You have to be, first of all, justified before God, prior to being sanctified and the work of sanctification ensuing. We’ll discuss this more when we come to the individual lectures on these doctrines, because conflating or confusing justification with sanctification results in terrible errors, as we’ll learn later in this course.

Glorification must come last. Why? Well, it’s pretty obvious. Glorification is still in the future, whereas all the others take place within time, in this present world—calling, and regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, and sanctification. Those all take place in this world. And so, as we saw in Romans 8, verse 30, glorification comes, in the sequence of salvation, it comes last.

Well, this is merely an introduction—an overview. In future lectures, we’ll consider many other passages in conjunction with each of these particular doctrines that we’ve touched on briefly here. The point is, in this introduction, to establish in our minds this big picture, overarching picture, of how the various components fit together.

Lastly, under the doctrinal consideration, we should underline the fact that the purpose of salvation is ultimately the glory of God. Now salvation results in great good for the individual soul, and that can be seen clearly in many ways, but the ultimate purpose isn’t really about man. The ultimate purpose is about God himself. God glorifying God. God glorifies himself in the redemption, reconciliation, deliverance, salvation of his own people. This is why, for example, the Bible says that all of the angelic beings in heaven rejoice over the repentance of a single sinner. God is fetching glory for himself. He’s showing his majesty whenever he comes and snatches a sinner as a brand from the fire, and draws them unto himself, forgives their sin, and reconciles them unto himself—God is showing his glory in those things. And so God has purchased, accomplished redemption, and applies that redemption, in order to magnify his own praise.

Thirdly, we can consider this polemically, and there are just a few things that we’ll note here.

First of all, we need to see the importance of striking the right Biblical balance. So we talked about the difference between redemption accomplished and redemption applied. For example, ministers can be guilty of the error of preaching only redemption accomplished, without redemption applied. The same thing can be true in terms of individual Christians and their thinking. And so all of the emphasis falls on past history—what the Lord has done in his incarnate ministry, and work of atonement, and so on—without speaking about the present benefit—how a sinner actually appropriates all that Christ has accomplished, how it becomes relevant in terms of their own possession of salvation. So you think, by way of example, a scientist, and they spend all of this time and effort, and they discover a cure for a terrible disease. Something important has been accomplished, but if it stays in their laboratory, and the information isn't shared with others, or more particularly, if that information isn't taken and then put to use, in terms of producing medicine or whatever, so that the cure can actually be taken to people that are dying of the disease, so that they take it and are healed or recovered, physically restored, then what's the point? And so we have to be careful not just to preach redemption accomplished, without emphasizing what the Bible teaches about how it's applied. But likewise, we can do the reverse. I said we need to strike the balance, because you can also be preaching all of the time, or thinking all the time about the application of redemption, without the accomplishment of redemption. So if we're speaking about the conversion of the soul, and everything is focused upon how a person is brought to faith, and the work of the Spirit in regenerating, and the place of repentance, and justification by faith, and so on and so forth, and that occupies or preoccupies all of the focus, without preaching Christ, and without preaching his person and work, all that he has done, preaching Christ crucified, the significance of the cross, all that he has secured for needy sinners, then you end up being in a terrible mess as well. And so there has to be both of these things held together. It's an error to emphasize one without the other.

Secondly, in considering this polemically, we spoke about the Biblical and Reformed view of the order of salvation. By way of contrast, Arminian theology, over against Reformed theology, makes some fatal mistakes. So the Arminian order of salvation would be, first of all, universal grace, then calling, then faith and repentance, then justification, then regeneration, then sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Evangelical Lutherans have a similar, though different, order of salvation. But I want to highlight one thing here for the sake of emphasis at this juncture. In both cases—the Arminian, Evangelical Lutheran, and others—they put faith before regeneration. This is a problem, a significant problem Biblically. So that they're saying that a person believes, and that by believing, they are then made born again, they are given a new birth, born from above, renewed. That is inverting what the Bible says. It's saying that a dead man has the ability to believe, and that after believing, he then gets a new nature. That's turning things on its head, and it has all sorts of catastrophic consequences theologically and Biblically. And so, I'm highlighting this to give you an example of why the order is important. And when we come to individual lectures on regeneration, faith, and so on, we will consider that in greater detail. So that's an error that we need to be alert to and confront polemically.

Thirdly, we need to beware of the error of displacing the centrality of the gospel in preaching, and in church life, and in the individual's experience. How does the kingdom of God advance in the world? It advances through the conversion of sinners. So, if in preaching, or in church, or in an individual's life, if they begin to become focused on other things, they're derailed, their diverted from the path that's right. So the focus Biblically is not on cultural transformation. The emphasis for the advance of the kingdom doesn't take place in cultural transformation, but through the preaching of the gospel, and the conversion of sinners. Now, cultural transformation comes as a



byproduct of that, as sinners are converted, and as they're disciplined in the things of God, and as they grow in grace, and as they carry out their gifts in the various locations that they have, there will be an impact upon society as a whole. But to put the byproduct first as the aim, is to put the cart before the horse. We can't displace the centrality of the gospel in preaching. There is a need for evangelistic preaching to the congregation. Every congregation is comprised of a mixed multitude. We don't view the congregation as everybody being born again—everybody having saving faith. There's a mix in every congregation, and we need to be pressing the need for individual salvation in our pulpits, and in the congregation, in the family, and so on—the centrality of the gospel, the application of salvation.

Fourthly, we can draw some practical applications to ourselves, briefly. We noted earlier that there is a tie between salvation and interest in the glory of God. Shorter Catechism, question 1, says that "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." Well, if our chief end—our primary purpose—is to glorify God, and if the way in which God gets glory is chiefly through the salvation of sinners, then we need to have a great interest, not only in our own salvation, but in the salvation of those that are around us, and beyond. The believer's heart throbs for God and his glory, and that deepens within our souls love and appreciation for the Doctrine of Salvation. What is our greatest need? What do we value most in this world? That question may not be easy to answer. We have to examine ourselves and think about what it is that we need most and value most. But when we are in a place that we should be spiritually, we will prize these doctrines. So all the doctrines we're going to be covering in this course will be absolutely beautiful. We'll see the need to seek the one thing needful, as the Lord says, and we'll value these doctrines for ourselves and for others. It has the impact of causing us to marvel at God's provision in his free and sovereign grace. Look at all he has accomplished, yes. Look at all that he applies to the individual soul, how each of these components—our calling, our regeneration, our faith, repentance, and justification, adoption—each of them meets the precise needs of our souls. It should lead us to marvel and to worship him.

Lastly, the practical application of the priority of evangelism and missions; this flows from what I've already said. Evangelism is a top priority. Foreign missions, taking the gospel to other tribes, peoples, languages, other countries in the world. The church can't be the church, unless we're fulfilling the commission to go to all the nations and disciple them, teaching them all that the Lord has commanded. There's a priority in evangelism, within the local congregation, reaching the communities and neighborhoods, within the family, as well as abroad in the world at large. This introduction to the Doctrine of Salvation reinforces that priority.

Well, by way of conclusion, in this introductory lecture, we've established from the Scriptures, the importance of the Doctrine of Salvation within Biblical Christianity, as well as for the believer's thinking, practice, and experience. In the remainder of the lectures throughout this fifth module on Systematic Theology, we'll be delving into a more detailed consideration of what God has revealed about each of the components of the application of salvation. And as we do so, we'll be led with David to sing, in the words of Psalm 106, verse 4, "Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation."