

Salvation: The Work of the Trinity

Christianity is monotheistic. The Lord our God is one. However, God has revealed Himself in three persons, who taken together we call “The Trinity.” In the early years of the church, there were many lengthy debates on the nature of the Godhead. Collectively, these debates have come to be known as the “Trinitarian Controversy.” Fortunately, the controversy was resolved as far as the Western church was concerned by the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. From this council emerged the Nicene Creed, which sets forth the orthodox (or biblically correct) understanding of the Trinity. Let me read it.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

However, the debate continued and a much more detailed creed was published around 500 AD, the Athanasian Creed, which has been so named because it is consistent with the teaching of Athanasius and with his defense of the orthodox view that was being attacked by a man named Arius who denied the divinity of Christ. Here are some excerpts from the creed:

....we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.

....And in the Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity.

They were serious about the Trinity. We should be too!

Many great theologians over many centuries have come to the conclusion that most heresies (those things which depart from the Christian faith) result from unorthodox views of the Trinity. In other words, to be a Christian an orthodox view of the Trinity is essential. The key is Tri-Unity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one. They are single-minded.

They are one note. There has never been and never can be a point of disagreement among them. Even though the Son was forsaken by the Father during the atonement, this necessary separation was purposed from all eternity and does not represent any disparity or contention. Although the three persons have different roles, they are of one mind and one purpose.

In a few weeks, we will celebrate the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It is at this time each year that, more than any other time, I consider what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. We know that without his atoning work on the cross we would have no salvation and no hope. One of our great desires as Christians should be to understand, to the limit of our ability, how we are saved. This is the very thing that angels desire to inquire into. We are called “Christians.” We pray in Jesus name. Christ is the central person of our religion and our worship. And rightly so! Yet , the work of the other two persons of the Godhead is just as essential to our salvation as the work of Christ. They too should be worshipped.

My goal is to present to you in simple terms how the three persons work perfectly together to secure the salvation of sinners and that whoever truly desires to be, without fail, will be saved.

First, we will look at the role of the Father. He is most associated with the decree and eternal purposes of God. From numerous scripture passages we see that God the Father has ordained or chosen a people for salvation. Let’s look at some of the many verses:

John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: 4According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love;

5Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

He has done this by the good pleasure of his sovereign will. The people whom God has chosen are in many places in scripture called “the elect.”

Mark 13:20

And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

Titus 1:1

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness

Romans 9:11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth ¹²It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. ¹³As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

¹⁵For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ¹⁶So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

Thus, we see that God’s electing grace 1) was at his pleasure, 2) was good, 3) was merciful, 4) was by his will, not our will, 5) was settled

before the foundation of the world and 6) was unconditional. Election has been understood in two different ways. One understanding is that God has looked into the future and foreseen who will chose to believe and He has chosen or elected them. But, in this view, the choice is not actually God's; it is the individual's. God only foresees and affirms their choice. This view contradicts the Scriptures. It also undermines His omniscience because having to look into the future or down the tunnel of time suggests a lack of knowledge in that he had to look into the future. If I already know, I don't need to look! This is the slippery slope down which the Open Theism proponents have slid. They deny that God knows all future events certainly.

The other view is that God has done the choosing Himself, which we believe to be the correct interpretation of the Scriptures. But, in either case, one must on the basis of Scripture accept the fact that God has chosen a specific people, the elect, for salvation. To deny election you must deny the Scriptures. God has been gathering his elect from the beginning and continues to do so. Those who were not chosen from the foundation of the world have died or will die in their sins and receive the eternal punishment deserved by all sinners. Take note, however, election by itself is not salvation it just guarantees that God will order all things necessary unto a person's salvation and bring them to pass. And, remember, without God choosing to save, no one would be saved.

Now, we come to the work of the second person, the Son. In order to be saved and not receive the punishment due sinners, a person must have

perfect righteousness. They must be justified before God. Jesus said to the rich young ruler “Why callest thou me good, there is none good but God.” By the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul has concluded all humanity in sin. “There is no one good, no not one. Thus, only God could solve the problem. So, by the predeterminate counsel and foreknowledge of God, the Son covenanted with the Father to substitute Himself in the form of a perfect man and sacrifice Himself as an atonement for sinners to accomplish their redemption and reconciliation to God. The Son united his divine nature with sinless human nature, became flesh and dwelt among fallen humanity becoming the God-man. He fulfilled law. His righteousness would be applied to them and their sins would be applied to him. Isaiah 53 describes what the Father and Son had from all eternity predetermined to do. Let’s look at Ish 53 starting at verse 4.

⁴Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

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.

⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

⁸He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

⁹And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

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.

¹¹He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

I don't think that there could be a more clear description of substitution. Jesus went to the woodshed for his seed. He got the whipping that everyone of his seed deserved. The punishment was delivered. By His stripes we are healed. The cup of God's wrath was drunk, every drop. His work accomplished its purpose allowing him to say "it is finished." His reward is that he shall see His seed and that He would be satisfied. From this text, it seems impossible that any of the seed could perish in their sins. Could He have any satisfaction in seeing people for whom he died in hell? May it never be!

Turn to John Chapter 10 and let's see what Jesus says regarding His atonement. Starting at verse 11 with one of the ego ami (I am) statements:

¹¹I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.

¹²But he that is a hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep.

¹³The hireling fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

¹⁴I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep and am known by Mine.

¹⁵As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

¹⁶And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring,

and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd.

¹⁷Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.

¹⁸No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received from My Father."

¹⁹There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings.

²⁰And many of them said, "He hath a devil and is mad. Why hear ye him?"

²¹Others said, "These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?"

²²And it was at Jerusalem the Feast of the Dedication, and it was winter.

²³And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's Porch.

²⁴Then came the Jews round about Him and said unto Him, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."

²⁵Jesus answered them, "I told you, and ye believed not. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.

²⁶But ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you.

²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me.

²⁸And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.

²⁹My Father, who gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.

³⁰I and My Father are one.

Jesus states that He is going to die for the sheep and that this will secure their salvation. The sheep represent the same people as His seed in Isaiah 53. Notice verse 26, belief or unbelief is determined by whether or not you are a sheep. Belief does not make a sheep. God's sheep believe because it is their new nature that God has given to them to believe. The sheep are the only persons who are justified and saved. In Matthew Chapter 25 Jesus describes what the Good Shepherd will do on the last day,

³¹When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

³²And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

³³And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

³⁴Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Goats never become sheep and sheep never become goats. I think everyone knows the fate of the goats.

In Ephesians 5, Paul affirms that Christ atoned for the church.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

²⁶That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

²⁷That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Once again, “the church” in this verse is the holy congregation, His seed, His sheep, the saints, the totality of all ever saved and all that will be saved. Spiritual Israel. Abraham’s Seed. All whom the Father had given Him.

And there are many other Scriptural proofs that I could use to further prove that Jesus atoned for the elect only. Yet, there remains a large segment of Christendom that believes that His atonement extends to all humanity and makes salvation possible for all humanity. These folks hold to a “general or universal” atonement. Our brothers and sisters who have this understanding base it on three main categories of verses. Those that refer to Christ dying for all. Those that refer to Him dying for the world and those that suggest that he died for the reprobate or those who have perished in their sin. Obviously, the Bible cannot teach that He died for all humanity and at the same time teach that he died only for the elect. One view must be true and the other must be false. Therefore, one group or the other is misinterpreting the Scriptures.

With that in mind, let's quickly look at a verse from each of these categories that have been used to support a universal atonement using two simple rules of Bible interpretation. Rule 1: Scripture interprets Scripture and Rule 2: context is king.

First, let's look at a verse which uses the word "all."

Turn in you're your Bibles to Hebrews 10:10.

¹⁰By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The "all" in this verse is taken by many to mean "all humanity." In fact, some translations such as the ESV place the heading "Christ's Sacrifice Once for All" at the beginning of chapter 10.

However, if one simply reads the whole chapter and particularly the next two verses and allows Scripture to interpret Scripture, it becomes abundantly clear that the meaning of "for all" in verse 10 has nothing to do with people, but is a reference to time.

¹¹And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

¹²But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

So, the "once for all" should be understood as "once for all time." It was a singular, sufficient sacrifice that made an end to sacrifices. There was only one sacrifice for sin, ever. All other sacrifices were symbols and done as acts of obedience looking to the Redeemer. This verse presents a problem for folks who believe that the old sacrificial system will be restored and presided over by Jesus in a future millennial kingdom. The time reference interpretation is affirmed by the context of the whole of Chapter 10, in which Paul is comparing the Levitical priesthood and their repeated powerless sacrifices to the Great High Priest and His all-powerful perfect sacrifice. The book of Hebrews folds up the old covenant and puts it away and unfolds the New Covenant.

In those verses that describe Jesus as being the Savior of the world or a propitiation for the whole world, such as John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2, world is

taken to mean all humanity. However, by applying the two interpretive rules, we can show that the meaning of “Savior of the world” is that Jesus is the Savior not only of the Jews, but the Savior of people from all nations. Having been God’s chosen people for so long, the Jews believed that the Messiah was coming just for them, and couldn’t believe that God sent His Son to reconcile “the world”, Jews and Gentiles, unto Himself. The Jews should have known that Messiah was for all men because God said through the prophets that He would call them His people who were not His people, meaning the Gentiles. But, because Jesus had come for the whole world and not just them, He was a stumbling stone to the Jews. John 17:9 explicitly states that all humanity was not on His mind as he prepared to go to the cross: “...I pray not for the world, but for them which thou (the Father) hast given me; for they are thine.”

2 Peter 2:1 is an example of the third category of verses. These appear to represent Christ as having died for persons who have perished in their sin. Let’s look at it.

¹But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

First, the greek word translated “Lord” is not the word used for Lord when referring to Christ. It is the word used for the Father. Also, there is nothing in the verse or its context that ties “Lord” to Christ. Second, Peter is writing to Jews who understand themselves to be the purchased people of God, that is, purchased out of the bondage of Egypt. So, Peter makes a reference to Moses’ rebuke of false prophets in his day, to rebuke the false teachers that would aggravate the church. The same rebuke is found in Deuteronomy 32.

⁵They (the false prophets in Moses day) have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation.

⁶Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?

Just as in these three cases, careful examination of all of the Scriptures that suggest a universal atonement can be shown to have been misinterpreted. On

the other hand, those that teach atonement for the elect are very clear and hard to misinterpret.

Yet, the universal atonement view is the more popular view and it is what most of us grew up with. We were taught that Jesus died and was punished for everyone's sins, making salvation possible for everyone. Salvation then hinges on whether or not the person believes that Jesus died for their sins. It has salvation rest in the will of the individual. This leads to the belief that you can lose your salvation. If salvation hinges on your faith, during times when your faith is strong, you are saved. During times of doubt, you're lost. Jesus must say "I am the revolving Door." It also leads to salvation by works of obedience and lack of assurance. The Bible however teaches that it is not by our will, but His will. The atoning work of Christ is dependent on no man's will.

I suggest to you that what happened at the Cross was between the Father and the Son and the effectiveness of that work to atone for sinners does not hinge one iota on whether or not a person believes it. As we have seen, the Bible teaches that Jesus' work accomplished its atoning purpose at the cross. Thus, it must be accepted as a fact.

Let me illustrate. Let's say a man owes me a million dollars and he has fallen on hard times and has 10 cents to his name. The debt is due. But, he has a friend with sufficient resources that knows that he owes me and sees his desperate need. The man's friend secretly comes to me and pays the debt. I stamp the debtor's account "paid in full." The next day, the debtor comes to me and confesses that he has no hope of ever paying me. I say "No problem, a friend of yours has paid your debt. You don't owe me a penny." The debtor says WOW! I can't believe it. And, I say, well, whether you believe it or not, it's paid. After it sinks in that his great debt has been erased, he believes it with every fiber of his body and is forever grateful for his friend's kindness.

When we really think it through in light of the Word, there are some serious difficulties with a universal, substitutionary, atonement:

1. If the substitute actually pays the debt owed to God for everyone's sin, then all humanity should be saved. We know for a fact that many are lost.

2. If the substitute actually pays the debt owed to God for everyone's sin, then God is punishing guiltless people in Hell.

3. If the substitute actually pays the debt owed to God for everyone's sin, then God is exacting two payments for those in Hell: one from Christ and one from the sinner. Can God be dishonest? We answer, of course not.

4. If the substitute actually paid the debt owed to God for everyone's sin, then there must be unfinished business. Can Jesus be a liar? We answer, of course not.

The next difficulty is the crux of my message.

5. If one person of the Trinity, the Father, has chosen a certain number of humanity to be saved, can another person of the Trinity (Jesus Christ) atone for all humanity or a different number? We answer, no, not without producing a conflict in the Godhead and exploding the Trinity.

Now, let us move on to examine the work of the Third Person in salvation, the great Gift giver:

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. He is the Spirit of the Father and He is the Spirit of Christ. The Bible also teaches that the Holy Spirit is responsible for the new birth, which is necessary for salvation. Turn to John 3

¹There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

²The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

³Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

⁴Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

⁵Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

⁸The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit (the wind), who by the sovereign will of God, comes to sinners, raises them from spiritual death, and gives them spiritual life. He removes their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh. Without the operation of the Spirit in renewing the mind and opening heart, the sinner would have no interest in the God and the Bible would be to them, foolishness.

The Spirit also is the agent of sanctification of the born again believer. The Spirit indwells them, seals them, and is the down-payment on their future heavenly inheritance as adopted children of God. It is He who draws the sinner to Christ.

John 6:44

44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:65

65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it be given unto him of my Father.

John 1:12¹²But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

¹³Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 5:¹⁹Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth

the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

²⁰For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

²¹For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

John 6:63

63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

The Father and Son quicken (regenerate, produce re-birth) by the operation of the Holy Spirit on those persons to whom They send Him. I believe that these verses taken together show that the three Persons are acting in concert and have exactly the same souls in mind to save.

I pray that I have proved to everyone here that sinners are saved by the three Persons of the Trinity each performing His perfect work in perfect unity with the other Persons. Electing love, redeeming love, regenerating and sanctifying love making them willing in the day of His power. From eternity, God has chosen a people. He redeems those people and saves only those people. There can be no hint of disagreement in the Trinity and any doctrine, such as universal atonement, that produces such a conflict must be rejected.

By way of brief application:

- 1) We should thank God every day that it has fallen out well for us. He could have passed us by.
- 2) How we view the atonement affects our evangelistic message. Those who hold to a universal atonement can look a lost person in the eye and say “Jesus died for your sins” without violating their conscience. Those of us which hold to elect atonement cannot do that with a clear conscience

because we don't know if He did or not. We must be faithful to Scripture and look to the Bible for help in forming a Biblical evangelistic language. In the New Testament, you never see Jesus, the apostles, or anyone telling a person that Jesus atoned specifically for them. They use the language: "Christ died for sinners." "Repent and believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." They don't get involved in a discussing the specifics of the atonement or election in their evangelistic encounters. Their main focus is repentance and belief in the Lord.

So, what can we say with a clear conscience? We can say God is calling all men everywhere to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus. Turn from your sin and He will save you to the uttermost. We can say that Christ has made an atonement for sinners. You're a sinner, repent and believe. We can say that whosoever comes to Him He will in no wise cast out. We can promise them that sincere comers cannot be turned away. However, the deep things of God are not for evangelism. They belong to discipleship. Milk is for babes. Evangelize with sincere milk. Strong meat is for growth and maturation.

Salvation is all God's work. That's why He says:

Eph 2:8-9

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Closing Prayer