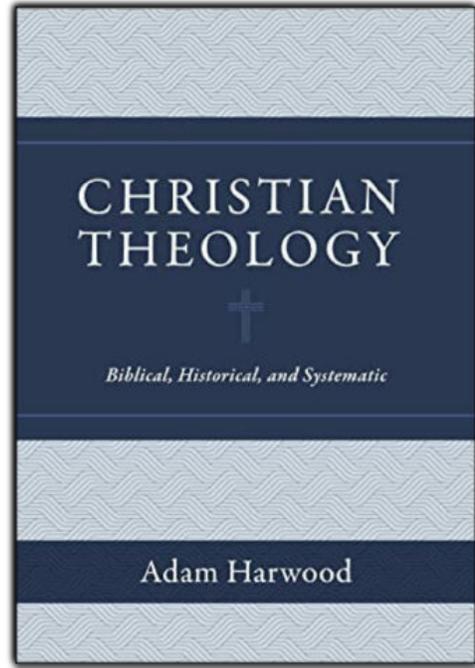


24. HISTORICAL SURVEY AND ISSUE IN THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION¹

This chapter addresses salvation, which refers to God saving sinners. Because salvation includes the application of Christ's atonement for sin, we could survey the historical views on salvation by referring readers to the models of the atonement presented in chapter 17. Some theologians address salvation primarily by focusing on the atonement.² Such a move is appropriate because the New Testament reveals that salvation is provided through the atoning life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. However, salvation also includes the application of the atonement as well as the response of sinners and salvation's effects. Thus, the historical survey below will highlight some of

the key theologians and ideas for the doctrine of salvation, while attempting to avoid repeating the material already presented in chapters 16–18. In the last section, we will consider the answers provided by two models of salvation to the question, "Why are only some people saved?"



HISTORICAL SURVEY OF SALVATION

Below is a selection of views to represent some of the major perspectives on salvation.³ All the views described below are orthodox positions in the church; thus, they are all viable options for Christians today. They are not presented as competing alternatives but as various perspectives with complementary emphases on God's work through Christ for sinners.

THE EARLY CHURCH: *THEOSIS*

In the early church, many writers conceived of salvation as ***theosis***, also called divinization and deification.⁴ *Theosis* refers to the view that God became a human so humans can be

¹ Adam Harwood, *Christian Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Systematic* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022), 607–650.

² See, e.g., Paul S. Fiddes, "Salvation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 176–96.

³ The doctrine of salvation overlaps at key points with the doctrine of atonement. Although the views on salvation of some important figures (such as Anselm and John Calvin) are not mentioned below, their views on the atonement can be found in chapter 17.

⁴ In addition to the examples in this section, see Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 653–54, for support for ***theosis*** in the writings of Hippolytus, Didymus the Blind, Origen, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil, and John of Damascus.

transformed by the Holy Spirit to become like God and participate in God forever. *Theosis* includes multiple biblical images of salvation, such as sanctification, transformation, and participation.⁵ According to this perspective, God participated in humanity when the eternal Son became incarnate to reveal the Father and redeem people (John 1:14; Heb 2:14). More shocking than God partaking in humanity is humans partaking in divinity. Peter writes, “He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may *participate in the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Pet 1:4). Through God’s promises, people can “participate” (Grk. *koinōnos*) in “the divine nature” (Grk. *theios physis*) in the sense that they can share in God’s nature.⁶

In the late second century, Irenaeus referred to “Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might *bring us to be even what He is Himself.*”⁷ Irenaeus’s remark was consistent with *theosis*.⁸ Biblical justification for this view can be found in the affirmations that believers are being transformed into the image of Jesus and will be like him one day. Paul states that believers “are being transformed into his image” (2 Cor 3:18). The apostle John explains that transformation begins during one’s lifetime and is completed at the appearance of his Son: “when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

Athanasius, in his classic defense of Nicene Christology titled *On the Incarnation*, writes about Jesus: “He was incarnate that we might be made god.”⁹ Athanasius also writes, “The Word was made flesh in order to offer up this body for all, and that we, partaking of His Spirit, might be deified, a gift which we could not otherwise have gained than by His clothing Himself in our created body.”¹⁰ Athanasius does not mean that people will become God

⁵ For a review of the biblical survey of these images, see chapter 22.

⁶ Tertullian interprets God’s remark in Gen 3:22 that Adam had become like God as a promise and future hope that people would be brought into the divine nature. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* (ANF 3:317), “Now, although Adam was by reason of his condition under law subject to death, yet was hope preserved to him by the Lord’s saying, ‘Behold, Adam is become as one of us;’ that is, in consequence of the future taking of the man into the divine nature.”

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (ANF 1:526), emphasis added.

⁸ Irenaeus’s view of salvation is sometimes called recapitulation, which refers to God’s work of reversing Adam’s fall through Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. As a result, sinners will be freed from Satan’s dominion, restored to their original state, and become like God.

⁹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 54, trans. John Behr (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), 107.

¹⁰ Athanasius, *De Decretis, or Defence of the Nicene Definition* (NPNF² 4:159). See also Athanasius, *Letter to Serapion concerning the Holy Spirit* 1.24, in *The Letters of Saint Athanasius concerning the Holy Spirit*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland (London: Epworth, 1951), 125, “It is through the Spirit that we are all said to be partakers of God.”

himself or a god. Rather, people will become *like* God by sharing in his life.¹¹ In the fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria wrote of the incarnate Word:

He wears our nature, refashioning it to his own life. And he himself is also in us, for we have all become partakers of him, and have him in ourselves through the Spirit. For this reason we have become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), and are reckoned as sons, and so too have in ourselves the Father himself through the Son.¹²

Because the Word is both divine and human, to partake in the Son and be indwelt by the Spirit is to partake in God.

Theosis emphasizes the transformation of sinners into the likeness of the Son by the work of the Spirit through union and communion with the triune God. This transformation and participation in God begins at union with Christ, culminates at his return, and continues into eternity. Although *theosis* is frequently associated with the Eastern Orthodox Church, it is also affirmed by the Roman Catholic Church.¹³ The view has a sound biblical basis, and it deserves further consideration by Protestants.¹⁴

AUGUSTINE: GRACE AND JUSTIFICATION

Augustine’s view of salvation centers on grace and justification. Prior to Augustine, the early church emphasized other aspects of salvation, especially *theosis*. His writings on justification profoundly influenced the church during the medieval and Reformation eras. In his view, salvation refers to God’s restoring humanity’s original righteousness that was lost in the fall. Prior to their disobedience in the garden, Adam and Eve were free in the sense that they were “able not to sin” (Latin, *posse non peccare*). However, as a result of disobeying God, they lost their original righteousness and corrupted the human race. As a result of the first couple’s fall, all people are now “unable not to sin” (*non posse non peccare*). In heaven, however, the divine gift is that those redeemed by Christ will be “unable to sin” (*non posse*

¹¹ Alister McGrath distinguishes between the Alexandrian school, which taught *theosis* (“becoming God”), and the Antiochene school, which taught *homoiosis theoi* (“becoming like God”). McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 339–40. In the former, believers are united to the substance of God; in the latter, they participate in the divine life. I present the view in a way that is intended to include both perspectives without confusing my readers.

¹² Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John 14:20*, trans. Daniel A. Keating, in *Deification and Grace* (Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2007), 21.

¹³ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2019), sec. 460, p. 116, states, “The Word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet 1:4)” (emphasis original). For a collection of biblical-historical essays by Roman Catholic scholars advocating for deification, see David Meconi and Carl E. Olson, ed. *Called to Be the Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2016).

¹⁴ For a history of *theosis* in the wider Christian tradition, see Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

peccare).¹⁵ Augustine's view of sin and its effects informed his perspective on justification and grace.

For Augustine, grace is a gift from God through which sinners receive the benefits of Christ's atonement.¹⁶ Faith itself is God's gift that is given to some, though not all, sinners. God calls only some people to be believers, and those elected are called in order to believe. Augustine explains, "He chose them that they might choose Him."¹⁷ Augustine distinguishes between faith that is only intellectual (and quotes Jas 2:19) from a true, justifying faith. True faith, Augustine argues (and quotes Gal 5:6), is accompanied by love.¹⁸

Augustine's views on salvation were not static. At the end of the fourth century, before his debates against the Pelagians, Augustine changed his views on both predestination and justification in three ways.¹⁹ First, Augustine previously believed humanity's election of God preceded God's election of humanity; he now taught that election to salvation was based on God's eternal decree of predestination.²⁰ Second, Augustine previously taught that people could respond to God by their free will, unaided by God. In this way, Augustine attributed the beginnings of faith to the human free will. However, he later retracted that position.²¹ His new view was that a person's response to God's offer of grace was itself a gift of God.,²² Third, Augustine always affirmed that people have free will (*liberum arbitrium*), but he later argued that fallen humans have no "freedom" (*libertas*) unless aided by grace.²³ Thus, sinners have a "captive free will" (*liberum arbitrium captivatum*) and must be healed by God's grace.²⁴ Justification, then, refers to God transforming the person with the "captive free will" into the person with the "liberated free will."²⁵ Augustine defines justification by asking: "What does 'justified' mean other than 'made righteous,' just as 'he justifies the ungodly' means 'he makes a righteous person out of an ungodly person?'"²⁶ Augustine views

¹⁵ Augustine, *The City of God* 22.30.

¹⁶ Augustine, *A Treatise on Grace and Free Will* 28; *A Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints* 3.

¹⁷ Augustine, *Treatise on the Predestination* 16, 32, 34 (NPNF¹ 5:515).

¹⁸ Augustine, *On the Trinity* 15.18.32.

¹⁹ For the development and influence of Augustine's view of justification, see Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38–54

²⁰ Augustine, *To Simplician—On Various Questions* 1.2.6.

²¹ See Augustine, *Treatise on the Predestination* 3; *Retractions* 1.23.3–4.

²² Augustine, *To Simplician* 1.2.12.

²³ For a study of Augustine's change of view on human free will, see Kenneth M. Wilson, *Augustine's Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to "Non-free Free Will,"* *Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum* 111 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

²⁴ For humanity's need for healing of original sin by God the physician, see Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 3.

²⁵ See Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 3.24 (NPNF¹ 5:414): "The free will taken captive does not avail, except for sin; but for righteousness, unless divinely set free and aided, it does not avail."

²⁶ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 26.45. For other examples of this justification as "to make righteous," see his *Commentary on Statements in the Letter of Paul to the Romans* 22; *To Simplician—* 1.2.3; *Sermon* 131.9; and *On Grace and Free Will* 6.13.

grace and justification as God liberating a sinner's captive will and making an ungodly person righteous.

Augustine, like some of his predecessors, links water baptism to salvation.²⁷ He views original sin as a transmitted corruption that requires remission. This perspective, when coupled with the sacramental view that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace, reinforced the developing practice of infant baptism in the early church.²⁸ Augustine explain why he wrote *The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones*: "I discussed in particular the baptism of infants because of original sin, and grace by which we are justified."²⁹ Though some will differ with Augustine's views on original sin and his linkage of baptism and salvation, his emphasis on grace as a gift and the justification of sinners continues to challenge his readers.

MARTIN LUTHER: GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Martin Luther is best known for writing the Ninety-Five Theses and nailing a copy to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany.³⁰ The document and folklore of the event in October 1517 served as a catalyst for the Protestant Reformation. Among the criticisms of the Roman Catholic Church's theology and practice, Luther declares, "The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been forgiven by God."³¹ Luther was an Augustinian monk who had suffered under the burden of his sin, unable to find peace with God. The phrase "the righteousness of God" resulted only in terror and torment, because Luther was unable to satisfy the God who is portrayed in Romans as pouring out his wrath against unrighteousness. Luther confessed, "I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners."³² Luther viewed God as piling burdens on hopeless sinners, and he viewed the

²⁷ Augustine, *On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and On the Baptist of Infants* 1.23 (NPNF¹ 5:23–24), "For what Christian is there who would allow it to be said, that any one could attain to eternal salvation without being born against in Christ,—[a result] which He meant to be effected through baptism, at the very time when such a sacrament was purposely instituted for regenerating in the hope of eternal salvation?" See also 2.43 (NPNF¹ 5:62), "The sacrament of baptism is undoubtedly the sacrament of regeneration."

²⁸ See Kenneth Keathley, "The Work of God: Salvation," in *A Theology for the Church*, rev. ed., ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 551: "In early church teaching, baptism became associated with regeneration and the washing away of original sin, so this naturally led to the conclusion that one should be baptized as soon as possible—hence the rise of the practice of infant baptism." For more on Augustine's link between infant baptism and his view of original sin, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 363; Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 808–9.

²⁹ Augustine, *Revisions* 2.59, in *Saint Augustine: The Retractions*, trans. Mary Inez Bogan, FC (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 187–88.

³⁰ I am indebted to Gregory R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 483–85, 509–11, for many of these Luther citations.

³¹ **30** Martin Luther, *The Ninety-Five Theses*, thesis 6 (LW 31:26).

³² Martin Luther, *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings* (LW 34:336).

gospel as a threat because of God's righteous wrath. Nevertheless, Luther continued to study the book of Romans. By October 1518, he realized he had misunderstood the phrase in Romans 1:17.³³ Luther explains, "I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith."³⁴ God's righteousness was no longer a threat to Luther but a blessing, because he realized the just God justifies us by faith.

Luther refers to "alien righteousness, that is the righteousness of another, instilled from without. That is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith."³⁵ He defines faith as "a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God."³⁶ He adds, "Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times."³⁷ Luther clarifies that faith "is something that is done to us rather than something that we do; for it changes the heart and mind."³⁸

Though Luther emphasizes justification by faith alone, he follows the tradition of linking salvation with water baptism. According to Luther, baptism "brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it."³⁹ He also writes, "Man is not born again of his own choice and idea; but a new birth must take place through Holy Baptism without man's contributing anything."⁴⁰ For Luther, baptism symbolizes God's grace. Because baptism was typically administered to infants—and without their request or permission—the act symbolizes grace and faith, both given without the sinner making the request. Some will differ with Luther's view that God causes people to be born again apart from their conscious decision to repent and believe, and others will

³³ For more on the background and timeline of Luther's understanding of justification, see Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 63–74.

³⁴ Luther, *Preface to the Complete Edition* (LW 34:337). For more on his views on righteousness, see Luther, *The Disputation Concerning Justification*.

³⁵ Martin Luther, *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (LW 31:297). He distinguishes between two types of righteousness. Luther identifies the first as "alien righteousness." He identifies the second type as "proper righteousness," which he defined as working with the alien righteous in doing good works and loving one's neighbor (299).

³⁶ Martin Luther, *Prefaces to the New Testament* (LW 35:370).

³⁷ Luther, *Prefaces to the New Testament* (LW 35:370).

³⁸ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6–14* (LW 2:267).

³⁹ Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, "The Sacrament of Holy Baptism," 2nd answer, in *The Annotated Luther*, vol. 4, *Pastoral Writings*, ed. Mary Jane Haemig (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 231. Question 3 is: "How can water do such great things?" The answer is: "Clearly the water does not do it, but the Word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a 'bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.'" This is followed by a quotation of Titus 3:5–8.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, in *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, compiled by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1:344.

reject his coupling of water baptism and salvation. Nevertheless, Luther's chief and lasting theological contribution is his steadfast declaration that God justifies sinners by faith in Christ alone.

CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM

In 1610, a group of theologians who aligned with the teachings of Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) on salvation signed a doctrinal statement called the Remonstrance.⁴¹ Some of the views rejected in the document included two types of predestination (**supralapsarianism** and **sublapsarianism**) as well as the teaching that Christ died only for the elect and that God's grace is irresistible.⁴² The political and theological conflicts between the followers of Calvin and the followers of Arminius continued and resulted in the Dutch Reformed Church hosting a series of meetings in 1618–1619 called the Synod of Dort. In the meetings, the Calvinists articulated their views on salvation and condemned the views of the Arminians.⁴³ The resulting document, called the Canons of Dort, contains a series of affirmations and rejections listed under five “main points” of doctrine. The five points of the Canons of Dort, which were later rearranged to create the TULIP acronym, have become a framework for discussing the Calvinist view of salvation. The points of the acronym are difficult to define because each one is explained with multiple affirmations and rejections in the original document. One's acceptance or rejection of each point of the TULIP depends on how each point is defined. Basic definitions are provided below to summarize each concept. Nevertheless, the best way to define each point (as it was understood by its original advocates) is to read the Canons of Dort.⁴⁴

Total Depravity—all people are born spiritually dead and unable to repent and call on the Lord unless first granted by God the gift of faith and will to believe⁴⁵

⁴¹ See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), 3:545–49, for the Latin and English texts of the statement.

⁴² Supralapsarian is the view of predestination that God decreed both the election to salvation and nonelection of individuals *before* Adam's fall. The prefix “supra-” refers to the logical order of the decree in relation to the fall; the decree was “above” (or before) the fall. Sublapsarian is the view of predestination that God decreed both the election to salvation and nonelection of individuals *after* Adam's fall. The prefix “sub-” refers to the logical order of the decree in relation to the fall; the decree was “below” (or after) the fall. This view is also called infralapsarianism because “infra-” means “after.”

⁴³ “The Synod, supported by Prince Maurice of Orange, was biased against Arminianism from the start and its decisions were a foregone conclusion.” F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 505.

⁴⁴ See the text in *The Canons of the Synod of Dort, 1618–19*, in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 4, *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 569–600. Other versions are available online.

⁴⁵ For a biblical survey of the effects of sin, see chapter 12 in this book. For analysis of original sin, see chapter 13.

Unconditional Election —God, out of his grace and according to his will, selected individuals to redeem through Christ’s atoning work on the cross⁴⁶

Limited Atonement —Christ died only to redeem the elect, not for the sins of the nonelect⁴⁷

Irresistible Grace —those whom God has elected to salvation will be effectually called by God’s Spirit and regenerated, resulting in repentance and faith

Perseverance of the Saints —those elected to salvation will persevere in faith to the end

Some Christians find this framework helpful for discussing the doctrine of salvation. The benefits of using TULIP when discussing salvation include the historical origin of the framework (the original document was developed in 1619) and shared categories for organizing the discussion (human sin, God’s choice, Christ’s death, God’s call, and the saints’ perseverance). The weaknesses of using this system are that it establishes the Calvinist interpretation as the basis for discussion (either affirming or denying each point), and it is wrongly interpreted by many people to represent the opposite views of Arminians on each point.⁴⁸

THEOLOGICAL ISSUE: WHY ARE ONLY SOME PEOPLE SAVED?

INTRODUCTION

Christians agree that humans are sinners who need to be reconciled to God, and the means of this reconciliation was accomplished through Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. Salvation was God’s idea and accomplished at his initiative. He planned to save sinners before their first sin. The Father sent the Son in the power of the Spirit to become fully human to redeem sinful humans. The loving and holy self-sacrifice demonstrated at the cross of Christ was for sinners and is the center of the Christian faith. There is widespread agreement on these points. Although not unanimous, there is a strong consensus among Christians on

⁴⁶ For analysis of predestination and election, see chapter 23.

⁴⁷ Affirming the Canons of Dort does *not* require one to affirm limited atonement, also called particular atonement. Some who attended the synod and affirmed the Canons of Dort also affirmed general atonement. Canon 2.3, for example, says that Christ’s death is “more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world” (*Canons of the Synod of Dort*, 580). See the discussions in G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus (1536–1675)*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 1997); and Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 149–57. Nevertheless, the definition of L provided above follows the common approach of defining L as an affirmation of particular atonement. For more on the extent of the atonement, see chapter 18 in this book.

⁴⁸ Roger E. Olson argues that classical Arminians differed with Calvinists on points ULI, agreed on the T, and took no position on the P. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myth and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

the question, “Will all people be saved?” Some Christians affirm **universalism**, the view that God will eventually save all sinners. They support their view by citing early advocates, such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, who understood *apokatastasis* (Grk. “restoration”) as a reference to God’s work of restoring all of creation to himself under Christ (see Acts 3:21; 1 Cor 15:28).⁴⁹ Origen’s view, which included the restoration of the devil, was condemned at Constantinople in 543. Other advocates of Christian universalism include F. D. E. Schleiermacher and Jürgen Moltmann, although it has always been a minority position in the history of the church.⁵⁰ Most Christian traditions affirm that some people will *not* be saved, a perspective consistent with biblical references to those who will be separated from God after death. For example, Jesus contrasted the wide gate and broad road leading to destruction with the small gate and narrow road leading to life (Matt 7:13). John, who writes of Jesus coming to bring eternal life (John 3:15–16; 4:14; 5:24; 10:28), also mentions God’s wrath (3:36), death (5:24), and the second death that awaits those who do not believe in Jesus (Rev 2:11; 20:6; 21:8).⁵¹

Despite the dissenting answer from Christian universalists, other Christians are united that God saves only some people. However, asking another probing question reveals significant in-house differences. In the following section, we will consider two major models of salvation that provide orthodox—yet different—answers to the question, “Why are only some people saved?”

TWO MODELS OF SALVATION

The large majority of Christians affirm a view of salvation that can be classified according to one of the models described below. I will refer to the models as “decretal theology” and “whosoever will.” One’s view of God’s activity in salvation is rooted in one’s view of God’s rule of all things. Thus, one’s perspective on providence informs one’s perspective on salvation.

⁴⁹ See Origen, *De Principiis* 2.3.7; 3.5.6; 3.6.6, 9 (ANF 4:274–75, 343, 347–48). See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 24–25 (NPNF² 5:494–95).

⁵⁰ See F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *On the Doctrine of Election* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012); Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), in which he interprets predestination to refer to God’s choice of all of humanity, rather than only some, for salvation. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1996), 235–55; and Nigel G. Wright, “Universalism in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 84 (2012): 33–339. For a massive historical survey and assessment of Christian universalism, see Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil’s Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018). For a contemporary advocate, see David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). Tom Greggs, “Christian Universalist View,” in *Five Views on the Extent of the Atonement*, ed. Andrew J. Johnson and Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 197: “Christian universalism is the view that the extent of the atonement is such that it is not only universally offered to all human beings but also universally effective for all human beings.”

⁵¹ For more on the eternal destiny of the unsaved, see chapter 30.

The views described below correspond approximately in these ways to the models of providence presented earlier in this book:

Table 24.1

Models of Providence	Models of Salvation
divine determinism	decretal theology
divine guidance	whosoever will
middle knowledge	both
open theism	whosoever will

Readers would benefit from reviewing the models of providence before proceeding in this chapter.⁵²

DECRETAL THEOLOGY

According to the **decretal theology model**, God decreed all events, including the salvation of certain individuals, before creating the world. This model is rooted in Augustinian predestination, and versions can be distinguished throughout history. The explanation below draws from the magisterial Reformed tradition. John Frame explains that God’s decrees are “decisions that God makes in eternity that govern history.”⁵³ God’s eternal decree (or decrees), also called his eternal decision, concerns the salvation of particular individuals. The Canons of Dort states,

The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from his *eternal decision*. For “all his works are known to God from eternity” (Acts 15:18; Eph 1:11). In accordance with this decision he graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of his chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by his just judgment he leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen.⁵⁴

According to this confession, God decided in eternity past which individuals he would choose to save and which individuals he would choose not to save. Because God’s grace is undeserved by anyone, the salvation of any person is an act of his mercy. The salvation of each person is determined by God’s decree. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

⁵² See chapter 8 to review the doctrine of providence.

⁵³ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 206.

⁵⁴ Canon 1.6, in *Canons of the Synod of Dort*, 572 (emphasis added).

states, “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.”⁵⁵

THE *PACTUM SALUTIS*

According to the decretal model, one of God’s eternal decrees was the *pactum salutis* (Latin, “covenant of redemption”), an agreement among the persons of the Godhead, before creation, to redeem a certain number of lost people.⁵⁶ The concept developed into a movement known as covenant theology, which emerged from within the magisterial Reformed tradition in the early 1500s in response to Anabaptist Reformers, who opposed infant baptism. In 1534, Heinrich Bullinger wrote about the covenant of grace. Others built on this concept, such as Dudley Fenner, who proposed a covenant of works in 1585. Though the terms “covenant of grace” and “covenant of works” do not appear in the biblical text, advocates nevertheless see the concept in Scripture.⁵⁷

Adam and Eve were the pinnacle of God’s creation, made in his image, blessed, and commanded to be fruitful and multiply as well as have dominion on the earth. These concepts of blessing, responsibility, and filling the land with other humans reflect God as endowing humans with the role of vassal kings over his world. Adam was to work and keep the garden, which included God’s design and commands regarding work (Gen 1:28; 2:15), marriage (2:23–25), and the Sabbath (2:1–3). In the covenant with Adam, God’s single command was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:16–17). Adam failed the test of covenant faithfulness. As a result of Adam’s disobedience, God’s blessing was replaced with his judgment. Humanity was indicted as guilty due to Adam breaking the covenant with God because Adam was the federal head of the human race. Christ, the promised seed (3:15), will be the second Adam, the faithful and obedient Son, who establishes the new covenant by his blood.

Reformed theologians sometimes distinguish between the *pactum salutis* and the covenants of works and grace described above. They regard the *pactum salutis* as theological speculation without the support of historic confessions and explicit biblical passages.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the *pactum salutis* is a reasonable theological inference for those

⁵⁵ The Westminster Confession of Faith 3.3, in *Creeks and Confessions* 2/4:610.

⁵⁶ I am indebted to Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 62–66; Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 431–68, for some of the ideas in this section on the *pactum salutis*.

⁵⁷ Letham (*Systematic Theology*, 431), “All the ingredients of a covenant are present in Genesis 2 even if the term itself is not.”

⁵⁸ Richard A. Muller, “Toward the *Pactum Salutis* : Locating the Origins of a Concept ,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 15 , “For all that this doctrine of eternal covenanting between Father and Son appears as the most speculative element in the covenant theology, it represents that most basic of issues in the Reformed system—the eternal, divine, and consistently gracious ground of the plan of salvation, the resolution of the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite, undertaken

who interpret biblical texts on predestination and election as references to God’s selection of individuals for salvation (such as Eph 1:4–5; Rom 8:29–30). Though the covenant of works and grace are not explicitly mentioned in Scripture, they provide explanations for several biblical ideas and find some support in historic confessions.⁵⁹

THE *ORDO SALUTIS*

The decretal theology model also proposed the *ordo salutis* (“order of salvation”), which refers to the sequence of events in an individual’s salvation. The *ordo salutis* concerns the logical rather than the temporal sequence of events. The phrase “logical sequence” refers to events as conceived of and planned by God, in contrast to the order in which those events are experienced by humans in time. The *ordo salutis* emerged during the Reformation era, and the concept can be described from the Roman Catholic and Lutheran perspectives.⁶⁰ The primary emphasis, however, is found in the Reformed tradition.⁶¹

Roman Catholics formulated their views on salvation at the Council of Trent (1545–1563). For them, the order of salvation typically begins with an infusion of grace at an infant’s baptism. Infused grace, received via the sacraments, makes sinners righteous. Those who are introduced to Roman Catholic teaching at an age later than infancy can receive sufficient grace, which can be resisted. However, when received by the person, it becomes a cooperating grace that results in justification and qualifies the person to be baptized. Faith is regarded as mental assent to the church’s teachings rather than belief that is required for salvation. Justification is preserved by doing good works, enabled in people by infused grace.

Lutherans emphasize righteousness by faith. God reconciled sinners to Christ, and the gospel is the announcement of that objective reconciliation. Though Lutherans also baptize infants, they did not locate the saving act in the water. Rather, people are regenerated (born again) by faith and baptism. Faith is present in the sponsors at infant baptism, and those who

redemptively and by grace alone from the divine side.” Letham writes, “The *pactum salutis* is a *theologoumenon* (theological opinion) rather than a dogma” (*Systematic Theology*, 433).

⁵⁹ For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith affirms the covenant of works and covenant of grace. “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (7.2); “Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace, wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe” (7.3), in *Creeds and Confessions*, 2/4:615.

⁶⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new combined ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 2:417, “The doctrine of the order of salvation is a fruit of the Reformation. Hardly any semblance is found in the works of the Scholastics.”

⁶¹ The categories and descriptions in this section are drawn from Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 2:415–22; Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (1932, 1938; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 455–60; and Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 231–43.

are baptized are later reminded to remember their baptism. Righteousness, for Lutherans, does not come as a result of an infusion of grace or subsequent cooperation between the sinner and God's grace. Rather, sinners are righteous only by faith in Christ alone, apart from good works.

Reformed theologians generally define the *ordo salutis* as the temporal outworking of God's eternal plan for an individual's salvation. Robert Letham explains, "In general, the Reformed order runs in logical rather than temporal fashion, from regeneration and effectual calling, to faith and repentance, justification and adoption, and on to sanctification."⁶² In Reformed theology, the *ordo salutis* is grounded in the *pactum salutis*. Louis Berkhof explains, "Reformed Soteriology takes its starting point in the union established in the *pactum salutis* between Christ and those whom the Father has given Him, in virtue of which there is an eternal imputation of the righteousness of Christ to those who are His."⁶³

First, God effectually calls and regenerates his elect. God effectually calls out the elect by means of the general call, which extends to all people who hear the preached word of God.⁶⁴ This general call should go out to all sinners because only God knows whom he has elected for salvation. God's Spirit draws the elect to salvation by convicting them of sin, regenerating them, and giving them the ability to believe in and call on Jesus. Thus, regeneration precedes faith. Recall that what is being discussed are the *logical* moments in salvation, not the *temporal* sequence of events. Thus, according to this view, sinners call on Jesus at the moment of their salvation (temporal sequence), but sinners call on Jesus *because* they have been born again (logical moments). Justification and adoption occur at the beginning of the Christian life, but they follow regeneration in the logical order of God's decrees. Believers are sanctified by God throughout life, they persevere by God's grace, and they will be glorified at Christ's return.

⁶² Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 612.

⁶³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 2:418.

⁶⁴ Bruce Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 16, "The general call is extended (in principle) to every person everywhere, yet not all of those who are called actually respond to the call and are saved. But the effectual call is extended only to some people (i.e., some of those who hear the general call), and when this effectual call comes to them, all of those so 'called' are saved. The effectual call effects the salvation of all of those so called."

Consistent with the Christian Tradition

The decretal theology model is consistent with the Christian tradition. An *ordo salutis* can be seen in the chapters on salvation in the Westminster Confession of Faith as well as the selection and arrangement of topics in two contemporary systematic theologies:⁶⁵

Table 24.2

Westminster Confession of Faith	Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology	John Frame, Systematic Theology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God’s eternal decree • God’s covenant with humanity • effectual calling • justification • adoption • sanctification • saving faith • repentance unto life • good works • perseverance of the saints • assurance of grace and salvation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the covenants between God and humanity • election and reprobation • the gospel call and effective calling • regeneration • conversion • justification • adoption • sanctification • baptism in and filling with the Holy Spirit • the perseverance of the saints • death and the intermediate state • glorification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Lord’s covenants • God’s decrees • calling • regeneration and conversion • justification and adoption • sanctification • preservation and assurance • glorification

The chart above illustrates that the Westminster Confession of Faith and these two systematic theologies presuppose a decretal viewpoint. These sources teach that God decided in eternity which individuals will be among the elect, and he established a covenant

⁶⁵ See the Westminster Confession of Faith 3, 7, 10–18. See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 647–60, 816– 1030; Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 55–86, 206–30, 934–1014.

of redemption. Additionally, they follow the golden chain of salvation discerned in Romans 8:29–30 (predestination, calling, justification, and glorification).⁶⁶

Assessment of Decretal Theology

The decretal theology model has several strengths. First, the model emphasizes God’s unilateral act in salvation. There can be no confusion about whether sinners contribute to their salvation because, in this model, they are saved due only to God’s gracious and eternal decision. Second, the model is logically coherent. Christ died to redeem only the elect because God decreed in eternity to save only those individuals he selected for salvation. The Spirit effectually calls and regenerates only the elect. Thus, the reason only some people are saved is that God decided to save only some people. Third, the model has significant support from the Christian theologians who have written systematic theology textbooks since the Protestant Reformation.

Despite its many strengths, the decretal theology model faces several challenges. First, the eternal decree and the *pactum salutis* are theological concepts with only implicit biblical support. Even advocates claim these concepts are theological inferences from Scripture rather than teachings based on explicit biblical passages.⁶⁷ Second, the *ordo salutis*, the denial of God’s desire to save every person, and the particular view of redemption all presuppose the legitimacy of Augustine’s disputed interpretations of predestination and election.⁶⁸ Third, an implication of the decretal theology model is that the only reason any person will be in hell is that God did not select them to be in heaven.⁶⁹ We will conclude this presentation of the decretal theology model by reconciling its perspective with Bible verses that seem to affirm God’s love for and desire to save every person.

⁶⁶ Romans 8:29–30 has been called a golden chain of salvation, based on the title of the book by William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, or the description of theologie, containing the order of the causes of salvation and damnation, according to God’s word* (London: Alde, 1592).

⁶⁷ In addition to the advocates quoted in the *pactum salutis* section, consider this remark by O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 54 : “To speak concretely of an intertrinitarian ‘covenant’ with terms and conditions between Father and Son mutually endorsed before the foundation of the world is to extend the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety.” Against this view, see Scott R. Swain, “Covenant of Redemption,” in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 107–25. He argues for the *pactum salutis* through “biblical reasoning” and “trinitarian reasoning.”

⁶⁸ See chapter 23 for the discussion of election and predestination.

⁶⁹ Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 57–58, “The question is not, ‘Why are the lost lost?’ but ‘Why aren’t the lost saved?’ The nasty, awful, ‘deep-dark-dirty-little secret’ of Calvinism is that it teaches there is one and only one answer to the second question, and it is that God does not want them to be saved.”

Does God Love Every Person?

First, does God love every person? John 3:16, a well-known verse, begins: “God so loved the world.” Does this mean God loves every person in the world? Reformed theologians provide different answers to this question. Some answer no, God does not love all people; others answer, yes, God loves all people but with different types of love. Francis Turretin writes that God’s love mentioned in John 3:16 “cannot be universal towards each and every one, but special towards a few.”⁷⁰ He deduces that since Christ died to save the world (v. 17), and since all people are not saved, then the love mentioned in v. 16 must refer to the elect only.⁷¹ Turretin interprets John 3:16 to mean that God loves only *some* people. John Owen’s interpretation of John 3:16 is similar. He explains that the “world” refers here to “sinful, lost men *of all sorts*, not only Jews but Gentiles also, which he peculiarly loved.”⁷² Owen also explains, “By the ‘world,’ we understand the elect of God only.” Scripture never describes God having a “natural affection” for all the people he created; rather, God loves only the elect. He concludes, “It cannot be maintained that by the *world* here is meant all and every one of mankind, but only men in common scattered throughout the world, which are the elect.”⁷³ Thus, some Reformed theologians affirm that God loves only *some* people.

Other Reformed theologians, however, reject that perspective. Rather, God loves *all* people but with different types of love. D. A. Carson distinguishes five ways God’s love is referenced in Scripture.⁷⁴ Two of those ways are “God’s salvific stance toward his fallen world” and “God’s particular, effective, and selecting love toward his elect.”⁷⁵ Bruce Ware, following Carson, distinguishes between God’s “general” love for all people and his “particular” love for his own people “that moves him to save them.”⁷⁶ Thus, God demonstrates his love for all people by providing them with common grace (blessings bestowed on all people), such as sunshine and rain on both righteous and unrighteous people (Matt 5:45). God also loves the

⁷⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:405.

⁷¹ Turretin (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:405), “It is certain that not the whole world, but only those chosen out of the world are saved; therefore to them properly this love has reference.”

⁷² John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 208 (emphasis added).

⁷³ Owen, *Death of Death*, 209–10, 216 (emphasis original).

⁷⁴ D. A. Carson distinguishes among five ways the Bible refers to God’s love: peculiar, between the Father and the Son; providential, over all things; salvific stance toward the world; particular, toward his elect; conditional, toward his people. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 16–21.

⁷⁵ Carson, *Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 17–19.

⁷⁶ Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” 29, cites Carson, *Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, when he draws this distinction. Ware then illustrates God’s particular love for his people by noting the love of a husband for his wife. He writes, “Just as ‘husbandly’ love is destroyed altogether if a man were only capable of loving all women (including his wife!) equally and exactly in the same way, so here God’s love for his own people is lost when the distinctiveness of this greatest of God’s loves is denied” (31).

world in the sense that he commands all people to repent and be saved, and he commissions his people to deliver the message of the gospel to the world.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, God has a particular and saving love for his elect only. He chose, from eternity, to save a particular group of individuals. Thus, advocates of the decretal theology model can affirm that God loves all people while simultaneously affirming that he desires to save only some people.

Does God Desire to Save Every Person?

Several biblical texts present a challenge to the decretal theology model because they seem to teach that God desires to save every person (1 Tim 2:3–4; 2 Pet 3:9). Does God desire to save every person? As with the previous question, some Reformed theologians answer yes, while others answer no. Those who answer yes distinguish between God's secret and revealed will. In his eternal decree, God desires to save only the elect. However, in his will, as revealed in Scripture, he desires to save every person. According to Paul Helm, John Calvin distinguished between God's secret will to save only those chosen for salvation and his revealed will to save all people.⁷⁸ John Frame differentiates between God's decretive will (God's foreordination of all things) and his perceptive will (God's values revealed in Scripture). God's *decrees* always occur, but his *precepts* do not always occur.⁷⁹

The decretive/perceptive (also called secret/revealed) will is a problematic solution, flawed in two ways. The two wills affirm contradictory claims, and there is no explicit biblical basis for affirming the existence of a will of God, which is *not revealed* in the Bible.⁸⁰ The implication is that God announces in Scripture that he wants to save all people, but secretly he has already decreed that he wants to save only some people. This secret/revealed will

⁷⁷ Carson, *Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 17–18, “However much God stands in judgment over the world, he also presents himself as the God who invites and commands all human beings to repent. He orders his people to carry the Gospel to the farthest corner of the world, proclaiming it to men and women everywhere.”

⁷⁸ Paul Helm writes of John Calvin's affirmation of the secret will of God (to save only those chosen for salvation) and the revealed will of God (to save all people), “different elements of the same will.” Helm, “Calvin, Indefinite Language, and Definite Atonement,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 1113. See also Raymond Blacketer, “The Development of Definite Atonement in the Reformed Tradition,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven He Came*, 138. He explains that Beza followed Calvin by denying two wills in God but affirming “two ways of considering God's will.” On the one hand, Blacketer writes, “God wills the salvation of all.” On the other hand, “God's grace is only for those whom he has chosen.”

⁷⁹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 346–56.

⁸⁰ Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1974), 33, ask: “But is there, in fact, the slightest basis in Scriptural language for distinguishing in this manner between a signified and an effectual will? We can discover nothing in Scripture which shows that God has an effectual or any other kind of will that men should stay unrepentant and so perish. If one is prepared to abandon any presupposition that God's will is always done, and accept the simple Bible teaching that a man perishes because he rejects God's plan for him and does not do the Father's will, then the whole elaborate apparatus of signified and effectual wills becomes unnecessary.”

perspective undermines the confidence readers can have in the truthfulness and authority of the Bible.

Andrew Fuller, who once affirmed the particular view of the atonement, warns against appeals to the secret will of God.⁸¹ He writes, “We must take the *revealed* and not the secret will of God for the rule of our duty.”⁸² Though Fuller affirms that God has a secret will, only God’s revealed will can be known. His will, known through Scripture, is that he desires to save every sinner. For that reason, Fuller argues, Christians should pray for the salvation of sinners. According to Matthew Bryant, “For Fuller, substituting the revealed for the secret will of God as a rule for life not only led to the grievous error of prayerlessness for one’s neighbors, hearers, children, and so forth, it also subverted the chief obligation of God’s moral law—to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.”⁸³

What if this secret/revealed principle were applied to other concepts in the Bible? Kenneth Keathley raises this concern: “Christ manifests the revealed will of God, but the revealed will is not always done because it is supplanted by God’s secret will which lies hidden in the Father. This leads to the disturbing conclusion that Jesus does not present God as He really is.”⁸⁴ The secret/revealed concept leads to other problems. Is it possible that God’s *revealed* will is that Christ will return, but his *secret* will is that Christ will *not* return? This simultaneous affirmation of contradictory claims is problematic. We can know God’s will on a matter only when he has revealed his will in the Bible, and the secret (or decretive) will would contradict the statements in Scripture that God desires every person to be saved.

Rather than the secret/revealed distinction, a more fruitful view of God’s will regarding salvation can be found in Thomas Aquinas’s antecedent/consequent will.⁸⁵ Jeremy Evans explains: “Regarding salvation, God wills *prior to and independent of* considering the free decisions of people that all of them will be saved; *after* consideration of a person’s free decision he may or may not will for them to be joined with him in glory.”⁸⁶ Appropriated by the whosoever will model, this would mean that antecedent (prior) to a person’s decision

⁸¹ Fuller’s views on the atonement changed, and he later affirmed a general view of the atonement. For a review of the primary and secondary sources, see David L. Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 477–97.

⁸² Andrew Fuller, “Defence of the ‘Gospel of Christ Worthy of all Acceptation,’ in reply to Mr. Button and Philanthropos,” in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 2:453 (emphasis original).

⁸³ Matthew C. Bryant, *Constructing a Theology of Prayer: Andrew Fuller’s (1754–1815) Belief and Practice of Prayer*, Monographs in Baptist History 17, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 70.

⁸⁴ Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 55.

⁸⁵ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burnes and Oates, 1942), 1:272.

⁸⁶ Jeremy Evans, *The Problem of Evil: The Challenge to Essential Christian Beliefs*, B&H Studies in Christian Apologetics (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 85 (emphasis original).

about salvation, God desired the person to be saved; however, consequent to (after) their final decision about salvation, God desired only those who have believed in Jesus to be saved.

Others within the decretal theology model concede that God does *not* desire to save every person. Rather, he desires to save *every kind* of person. Francis Turretin comments on 1 Timothy 2:4, “God wills not that all men individually, but some from every class or order of men should be saved.”⁸⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner also affirms this view. He asks about 1 Timothy 2:4, “Does ‘all people’ (pantas *anthrōpous*; v. 4) refer to every person without exception or to every person without distinction? The Reformed have traditionally defended the latter option.”⁸⁸ He interprets the verse to mean God desires to save all *kinds* of people. No one is excluded from God’s plan of salvation because of their ethnicity, sex, social class, or economic status.⁸⁹ Thus, God desires to save a variety of people from among all people. Schreiner concludes, “In sum, Paul reminds his readers of a fundamental truth of his gospel: God desires to save all kinds of people.”⁹⁰

Advocates of the decretal theology model affirm that God desires to save all people. However, what they mean is that either (1) God desires this only according to his revealed will, not his secret will, or (2) he desires to save all types of people, not every person.

WHOSOEVER WILL

According to the **whosoever will model**, God loves and desires to save every person, Christ died for every person, and anyone can respond in repentance and faith to the message of the gospel and be saved. The model derives its name from a cluster of Bible verses that refer to the invitation to salvation.⁹¹ The best-known verse that uses the term is John 3:16 KJV, which states, “*whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”⁹² God provides salvation for all sinners, and they are able to accept or reject the message of the gospel presented to them. Sinners are converted when they are convicted of their sin and

⁸⁷ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 1:408.

⁸⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven He Came*, 376.

⁸⁹ Schreiner (“‘Problematic Texts,’” 377 n10, emphasis original), “The focus on all kinds of people ensures that whatever gender, class, economic status, social standing, or moral history, *no one* is excluded from God’s salvation. The ‘all without distinction’ position is an expansive, all-inclusive one, and should not be understood otherwise.”

⁹⁰ Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts,’” 377. He also writes, “God desires to save individuals from every people group.”

⁹¹ The word “whosoever” is especially prominent in the KJV, but the *concept* is found in other Bible translations.

⁹² Other examples include: Jesus told the Samaritan woman that “*whosoever* drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst” (4:14). Jesus assured Martha that “*whosoever* liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (11:26). This invitation is extended in the final chapter of the Bible: “And let him that is athirst come. And *whosoever* will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:14; see also Isa 55:1; Rev 21:6).

drawn by God's Spirit through the message of the gospel to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus, who is Savior and Lord. This model presupposes many concepts that were covered in previous chapters. All people are sinners who cannot save themselves, the Holy Spirit convicts and draws sinners, God provides atonement for every person (general atonement) through the events of Christ's cross, and salvation comes only by grace and through faith in Jesus.

According to the whosoever will model, God desires a covenant relationship with people, which is seen in their conversion (which entails both repentance and faith) and confession. The New Testament pattern for salvation is that some people hear the message of the gospel, and some of those people repent of their sin and believe in Jesus. Those who repent and believe also confess their faith in Jesus. This pattern of salvation is based on these concepts in the Old and New Testaments: covenant, conversion, repentance, faith, and confession. These concepts will be explored below.

Covenant

A covenant relationship with God is a key concept in both testaments. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament, a covenant (Heb. *bərît*) is made between individuals, such as between Laban and Jacob (Gen 31:44) or between David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:3). In other instances, God made covenants with people, such as with Abraham (Gen 12; 17), Moses and Israel (Exod 34:27), and David (2 Sam 7:8–16; 23:5). These covenants follow the form of an ancient agreement called a suzerain-vassal covenant. The book of Deuteronomy follows the form of this ancient contract, in which the powerful party (in this case, Yahweh) initiated the covenant with the weaker party (Israelites) to grant protection in exchange for obedience and allegiance. Yahweh echoed the covenant formula when he declared he would be their God, and they would be his people (Gen 17:7–8; Exod 6:7; Jer 31:33). The concept of covenant is significant for understanding salvation in the Old Testament because the covenant reveals God's desire for a relationship with people, his initiative in creating that relationship, the corporate nature of God's saving activity (God sometimes rescued a group of people), and the obligations of his people.

In the New Testament, Jesus declared at the Last Supper that the cup poured out for his disciples was the "new covenant" (Grk. *kainē diathēkē*) in his blood (Luke 22:20; see also 1 Cor 11:25). Paul identifies himself as a minister of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:5–6). Paul also identifies Christ as Abraham's seed and explains that those who receive Christ by faith are Abraham's descendants and will receive the promised inheritance (Gal 3). The author of Hebrews identifies Jesus as the mediator of a new and better covenant, who offered himself as a better priest, tabernacle, and sacrifice (Heb 8–9). The concept of covenant is similar in the Old and New Testaments, revealing God's desire for and initiative in establishing a

relationship with people, a corporate nature to salvation, and the demands for holiness on God's people.⁹³

Conversion

The concept of conversion is found throughout the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament refers to people either turning—or failing to turn—to the Lord (Isa 6:10; 31:6; Jer 3:10, 12, 14, 22; Amos 4:6, 8, 10; Zech 1:2–4). Isaiah announces, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near” (Isa 55:6). In the next verse, the prophet says about wicked and righteous people: “Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isa 55:7b). Isaiah invites all people to turn to God for mercy and pardon (see also 55:1).

Conversion also appears in the New Testament. On their way to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas “told how the Gentiles had been converted” (Acts 15:3). Epaenetus is identified as “the first convert to Christ” in Asia (Rom 16:5). When Paul provides guidelines for the overseer, he warns that such a person should not be a “recent convert,” or he may become conceited and fall into the devil’s trap (1 Tim 3:6). Darrell Bock writes, “In the New Testament conversion seems to summarize the call of the church in response to Jesus’s commission to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations, as the Old Testament called for (Luke 24:43–47). In sum, conversion is a turning to embrace God.”⁹⁴

In Acts 3:19 and 26:20, the language of repenting of sin is included with the language of turning to God. In other cases in the book of Acts, repenting and turning are present in *concept* but not explicitly. Examples of the *concept* of repenting and turning include Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus (ch. 9), Cornelius (ch. 10), Lydia (16:11–15), and the Philippian jailer (16:25–34). Christian converts are people who repent of their sin and turn to God through believing in Jesus Christ. Donald Bloesch explains, “We cannot be converted through our own power, but we can repent and turn to Christ through the power of his Spirit.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Brenda B. Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 44–65.

⁹⁴ Darrell Bock, “Convert, Conversion,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 118.

⁹⁵ Donald G. Bloesch, “Conversion,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). He adds, “We do not procure salvation, but we decide for salvation once our inward eyes are opened to its reality. Conversion is the sign but not the condition of our justification, whose sole source is the free, unconditional, grace of God.”

Repentance

In the Old Testament, the primary word for repentance means “to turn back” (*šûb*).⁹⁶ Jeremiah uses the term when he declares God’s judgment against Jerusalem: “They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent [*šûb*]” (Jer 5:3). God’s people refused to turn away from their sinful actions and return to him. Lesley DiFransico defines *šûb* as follows: “The basic meaning of return or change in direction is used metaphorically to express repentance as a change in direction away from sinful actions toward obedience to God.”⁹⁷ In the New Testament, the key words are the noun “repentance” (*metanoia*) and the verb “to repent” (*metanoēō*). John the Baptist and Jesus began their public ministry by declaring that people should repent (Matt 3:2; 4:17). They used the imperative form of the word, which means they were issuing a command. Jesus denounced the cities that did not repent (Matt 11:20), which implies they could repent but refused to do so. In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter identified Jesus as the crucified and risen Christ and commanded the people repent (Acts 2:38). In his sermon at Mars Hill, Paul declared that God “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30a). Repentance has been defined as “the acknowledgment and condemnation of one’s own sins, coupled with a turning to God.”⁹⁸ Keathley identifies genuine repentance of the whole person—mind, body, and will—in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–24). The younger son evidenced a change in his thinking (v. 17), his emotions (v. 19), and his will (v. 18).⁹⁹ Godly sorrow leads to repentance, which results in salvation (2 Cor 7:10). In the Old and New Testaments, people who repent of their sin and turn to God receive healing, restoration, and salvation.

Faith

The word “faith” rarely appears in the Old Testament as a noun.¹⁰⁰ The primary word inspired authors use is a verb translated “to believe” (*āman*). For example, Abram *believed* the Lord, and the Lord considered Abram’s response as righteousness (Gen 15:6). Also, when Judah was threatened with invasion, King Jehoshaphat led his people to seek the Lord and his help. The prophet Jahaziel declared they would see the salvation of the Lord. Before the victory, the king told the people, “Believe [*āman*] in the Lord your God, and you will be established;

⁹⁶ For a comprehensive biblical theology of repentance, see Mark J. Boda, *“Return to Me”: A Biblical Theology of Repentance*, NSBT 35 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

⁹⁷ Lesley DiFransico, “Repentance,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014) (original in italics).

⁹⁸ Cross and Livingstone, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. “Repentance.”

⁹⁹ Keathley, “Work of God,” 575–76.

¹⁰⁰ The word faith appears only four times in the NASB (Deut 32:51; Job 39:12; Ps 146:6; Hab 2:4).

believe [*’āman*] in his prophets, and you will succeed” (2 Chr 20:20 CSB).¹⁰¹ The people believed the Lord, and he delivered them. The Ninevites, upon hearing Jonah’s warning that their city would be overthrown in forty days, “believed God” (Jonah 3:5). Rather than referring to the concept of faith without a personal object of faith, biblical authors refer to people believing, or trusting, God.

Faith in Jesus is a foundational concept in the New Testament. The concept of faith appears 243 times as a noun (*pistis*, “faith”) and 241 times as a verb (*pistueō*, “to believe”). To have faith is to believe. In the New Testament, the Old Testament concept of believing God incorporates believing his Son. Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion (Matt 8:10), saw the faith of the paralytic’s friends (Matt 9:2; Mark 2:5), and told the bleeding woman that her faith made her well (Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34). Paul, when he bid the Ephesus elders farewell, “declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21, emphasis mine).

In John’s Gospel, faith is never a noun (*pistis*, “faith”) but always a verb (*pistueō*, “to believe”). Such an emphasis is striking because other biblical authors use both terms. John’s exclusive use in his Gospel of the word, which means “to believe,” reveals a point that the author intended to make to his audience. John had no interest in mentioning faith or belief as a concept. However, John uses the verb “to believe” ninety-six times to emphasize the need for people to believe in Jesus.

The terms for “belief” can refer to knowledge or trust. Some people believe only in the sense that they know something to be true (knowledge). But mental assent *only* to theological truth will not save a person. Consider, as examples, that demons believe (*pisteuein*, “to believe”) that there is one God (Jas 2:19), and demons address Jesus as Son of the Most High God (Mark 5:7). Those statements of theological truth were uttered by demons who were not, and never will be, saved. Salvation requires repenting of sin and believing in Christ in the sense that people personally entrust themselves to Christ. Paul writes that we are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). Salvation is a gift of God that is received by faith, or trusting in Christ. Keathley explains, “Faith is the instrument by which we accept salvation.”¹⁰²

Confession

In the Old Testament, confession typically refers to confessing sin to God (Ps 32:5). Those who confess their sin to God receive mercy and forgiveness. In the New Testament, confession adds another meaning. Paul tells believers in Rome that if they confess

¹⁰¹ In a clever wordplay in the Hebrew, the *hiphil* verb form *ha’āminû* (“trust”) and the *niphal* verb *tē’āmēnû* (“you will be safe”) come from the same root verb, *’āman* (“to believe”). *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (n.p.: Biblical Studies, 2006), 2 Chron 20:20.

¹⁰² Keathley, “Work of God,” 577.

(homologeō) with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the dead, they will be saved (Rom 10:9). The word *homologeō* means “to make an emphatic declaration, often public, and at times in response to pressure or an accusation.”

¹⁰³ Jesus explained he would “acknowledge” (homologeō) before his Father in heaven those who “acknowledge” (homologeō) Jesus before others (Matt 10:32; cf. Luke 12:8). In the New Testament and the early church, confessing Jesus as Lord meant publicly identifying with his death, burial, and resurrection—often at personal cost (John 9:22; 12:42) and usually through submitting to water baptism (Acts 2:36–41; 8:12, 26–38; 10:44–48; 16:13–15, 25–34). Confession of Jesus’s lordship was a prerequisite to salvation, and the initial confession of Jesus’s lordship typically occurred in the waters of baptism.

Consistent with the Christian Tradition

The whosoever will model is also consistent with the Christian tradition. Like the previous model, advocates of this model teach that sinners are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus. However, they affirm a different view of grace and faith in the life of a sinner than the previous model. They also provide a different answer to the question, “Why are only some people saved?” Balthasar Hubmaier and E. Y. Mullins are examples of theological perspectives consistent with the whosoever will model.

Balthasar Hubmaier

Balthasar Hubmaier (1480–1528) describes, in the question-and-answer format of a catechism, why only some people are saved. ¹⁰⁴ God draws or calls people in two ways, outwardly and inwardly. The outward calling is through the public preaching of the gospel, which should be declared to all people. He then describes the inward calling: “God also illuminates the person’s soul inwardly, so that it understands the incontrovertible truth, convinced by the Spirit and the preached Word.” Those who do not understand “have to pray and in faith ask wisdom of God.” What happens to those who refuse to hear and obey God’s word? Those people are “condemned in their own unbelief, for which condemnation they themselves are guilty and not God. For God has often desired to gather them with his Word like a hen her chicks, but they of their own volition have freely and wickedly refused.” ¹⁰⁵

Hubmaier does *not* teach that sinners are saved by means given to only some people, such as faith given to only some people, God’s selection of only some people, or the Spirit effectually drawing only some people. Instead, the Spirit and the message are the only

¹⁰³ L&N, 412.

¹⁰⁴ Balthasar Hubmaier was a leader in the Anabaptist movement of the Protestant Reformation.

¹⁰⁵ Balthasar Hubmaier, *A Christian Catechism*, in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, Classics of the Radical Reformation 5 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1989), 362–63.

means required for any sinner to be saved.¹⁰⁶ Those who reject the message of the gospel will be condemned because of their unbelief, though they *could* have believed. In *Freedom of the Will, I*, Hubmaier criticizes the “false opinion” that God sends “a special, unusual, and miraculous drawing of God which he would use with them [unbelievers], as if the sending of his holy Word were not enough to draw and summon them.” Balthasar’s view is also summarized in the subtitle of *Freedom of the Will, II*: “God, by means of his sent Word, gives power to all people to become his children and freely entrusts to them the choice to will and to do good.”¹⁰⁷ Hubmaier teaches that anyone can be saved by responding positively to God’s word and Spirit.

E. Y. Mullins

Mullins’s views are also consistent with the whosoever will model.¹⁰⁸ Mullins writes, “There is absolutely no barrier to the salvation of any, save their own wills. Christ died for all. God is willing to receive all who will come. God knows that some will not accept. Indeed, he knows that all will refuse unless by his special grace some are led to believe.” Here, Mullins pairs a general view of the atonement with foreknowledge—not determination—of who will accept the message of the gospel. The “special grace” he mentions should not be confused with the effectual grace of the decretal theology model. Mullins adds, “The choicest element in man’s spiritual life in God’s sight is his own free act in choosing God and returning to him. The gospel invitation makes this choice possible.”¹⁰⁹

After affirming God’s initiative in salvation, Mullins writes, “The Holy Spirit operates most effectively through the use of means. Hence the means of grace are necessary for the effectual propagation of the gospel of the grace of God.” The means of grace here are calling and conviction of sin, which are “prior to God’s saving act in the soul.” Mullins does not divide the Spirit’s calling and conviction into two callings, one outward/ineffectual and another inward/effectual, like the decretal theology model. Instead, Mullins identifies one calling. He explains, “Calling is the invitation of God to men to accept by faith the salvation in Christ. It is sent forth through the Bible, the preaching of the gospel, and in many other ways. Nothing

¹⁰⁶ Emir F. Caner, “*Sufficiencia Scripturae*: Balthasar Hubmaier’s Greatest Contribution to Believers,” in *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists*, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 106, “Salvation’s enablement is based neither in the sufficiency of man nor in the secrecy of God; it is found in the sufficiency of God’s Word.”

¹⁰⁷ Balthasar Hubmaier, *Freedom of the Will, I–II*, in *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 447, 450 (commas added for clarity and capitalization altered for conformity in style).

¹⁰⁸ E. Y. Mullins (1860–1928) was a Baptist pastor, theology professor, and influential leader. At various times during the beginning of the twentieth century, he served as president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Baptist World Alliance.

¹⁰⁹ E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1917), 354.

can be clearer from the teaching of Scripture than the fact that the call and invitation are universal and that there is a free offer of salvation to all who hear and repent and believe.”¹¹⁰ Though advocates of the decretal theology model also affirm the universal offer of salvation, they affirm two different callings. Mullins affirms only one universal calling and offer of salvation to all people. Mullins also places the responsibility for the final state of unsaved humans on their sin and freedom. He writes, “Human sin and human freedom are factors in God’s problem with man. His grace goes as far as the interests of his moral kingdom admit. His omnipotence does not enable him to do a moral impossibility.”¹¹¹ For Mullins, God convicts, draws, calls, and invites sinners to be repent and believe, but God’s grace and power have moral limits concerning the salvation of sinners.

Assessment of Whosoever Will

Despite its value in interpreting the biblical story as God desiring a covenant relationship with people, seen in their conversion (which entails repentance and faith) and confession, the whosoever will model faces several challenges. First, many Bible verses seem to portray humans as spiritually *dead* and thus *unable* to respond to God, yet this model regards the lost as able to respond to the message of the gospel. Second, if God desires to save every person, then why are all people not saved? Has God failed to accomplish something he desires? This presentation of the whosoever will model concludes with brief answers to the two challenges.¹¹²

Spiritual Death and the Inability to Respond

Advocates of the decretal theology model typically teach that because people are spiritually dead, they are naturally unable to respond to God. Rather, the unsaved need God’s grace to cause them to be born again so they can believe in Jesus. They interpret the doctrine of total *depravity* to mean that unsaved people have a total *inability* to repent and be saved. The Canons of Dort states, “Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.”¹¹³ According to the decretal perspective, people do not *become* children of wrath due to their sinful acts but

¹¹⁰ Mullins, *Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, 364–65. He quotes these verses in full to support the claim of a universal calling and invitation: Ezek 33:11; Isa 55:7; Matt 11:28; Mark 16:15; Rev 22:17; Rom 8:30.

¹¹¹ Mullins, *Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, 366.

¹¹² Another challenge to the whosoever will model concerns the interpretation of election and predestination that teaches that God, in eternity, selected certain individuals for salvation. See chapter 23 for that discussion.

¹¹³ Article 3 from the section titled, “The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine: Human Corruption, Conversion to God, and the Way It Occurs,” *Canons of the Synod of Dort, 1618–19*, in *Creeds and Confessions*, 2:584.

are born as children of wrath. Also, sinners are unable to return to God apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit. In other words, sinners must be saved to return to God. James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken explain, “In this sad and pervasively sinful state we have no inclination to seek God, and therefore *cannot* seek him or even respond to the gospel when it is presented to us. In our unregenerate state, we do not have free will so far as ‘believing on’ or ‘receiving’ Jesus Christ as Savior is concerned.”¹¹⁴ Unbelievers *cannot* respond to the gospel by repenting and believing in Jesus when the gospel is presented. Advocates of the decretal theology model teach, consistent with the Canons of Dort, that people believe in Jesus *after* they are born again.

In reply, advocates of the whosoever will model reject the claim that people are unable to repent of sin and believe in Jesus. They think Ephesians 2:1–3 is misinterpreted by others to mean that all people are under God’s wrath due merely to their physical birth because sin is passed to them at conception.¹¹⁵ The verse indicates that *unbelievers* are subject to God’s wrath due to their *sinful acts* rather than due to their *physical birth*. Ben Witherington III comments on verse 3,

All Christians, Jew or Gentile, once lived according to the desires of “our flesh,” by which he means carrying out in actions one’s sinful inclinations. Thus “we,” which clearly refers to Jews, were once “children of wrath by nature like everyone else.” It should be clear that Paul does not mean that people were destined for wrath, since he is talking about himself and in this case other Jewish Christians. He means that they were acting in a fallen way like those who deserved God’s wrath.¹¹⁶

Scripture reveals various metaphors for sinners who have not yet repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus for their salvation. They are referred to as sick (Matt 9:12), blind (Matt 15:14; 2 Cor 4:4), lovers of darkness (John 3:19), and dead (Luke 15:24; John 5:24; Eph 2:1). Some readers misinterpret spiritual deadness by inserting the idea that the unsaved *cannot* repent of sin and believe in Jesus unless God first grants them faith. However, Scripture does not require such an interpretation of spiritual death, and even some Calvinist theologians reject the idea that regeneration precedes faith.¹¹⁷

Consider the metaphor of spiritual deadness. In the garden, Adam and Eve, who died spiritually when they ate the fruit, were able to hear from and respond to God (Gen 3:10–13).

¹¹⁴ James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 30 (emphasis original).

¹¹⁵ See chapter 13 for more on the doctrine of original sin.

¹¹⁶ Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 253–54.

¹¹⁷ See, e.g., Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, FET (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 264–65; and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 863.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the spiritually dead person (the son) was able to return to his father (Luke 15:24). Like the two previous parables (vv. 7, 10), the son returning to the father depicts a sinner's repentance. The spiritually dead son was able to repent of his sin and return to his father. In John 5:24, a spiritually dead person is able to hear and believe in Jesus. In the story of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus raised his friend from *physical* death (John 11). As already noted, some Christians wrongly conflate the metaphor of being raised from *spiritual* death (Eph 2:1) with the story of Lazarus being raised from *literal* death. Affirming that people are spiritually dead does not require a denial that sinners can repent and believe in Jesus.¹¹⁸ In Scripture, spiritually dead people can and do respond to God.

In Acts 17:30, Paul indicates *whom* God commands to repent of sin. Paul declares, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands *all people everywhere* to repent." The preaching of the apostles included the call to repent of sin and believe in Jesus to be saved (see Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 20:21; 26:20). The *command* to repent implies that people are *able* to repent. It would be unjust for God to command a task and then judge people who failed to do what he commanded if they were *unable* to do so.¹¹⁹ God, who desires the salvation of every person and commands every person to repent and believe in Jesus, draws every person to himself (John 12:32). Faith is the means of salvation.¹²⁰ To assert that God grants faith to only some people is to wrongly affirm that God desires only some people to believe in Jesus.¹²¹ Henry Thiessen observes, "It would seem very strange if God should call upon all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30; 2 Pet 3:9) and believe (Mark 1:14, 15), when only some men may receive the gift of repentance and faith."¹²²

Some confessions of faith affirm both the sinfulness of humanity and the ability of sinners to repent and believe in Jesus. Article 6 of the New Hampshire Confession (1833), titled "Of the Freeness of Salvation," states, "Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth

¹¹⁸ Ronnie W. Rogers explains, "I affirm that man is dead in his sins (Ephesians 2:1), and that the fall of man corrupted every aspect of man, making him utterly incapable of turning to or relating to God in any meaningful way without God initiating and enabling him to do so. I affirm that the effects of the fall of man are extensive—affecting the whole being—and not intensive, destroying any and every ability to respond to God without being regenerated first." Rogers, *Reflections of a Disenchanted Calvinist: The Disquieting Realities of Calvinism* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 21. See also Rogers, *Does God Love All of Some? Comparing Biblical Extensivism and Calvinism's Exclusivism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 160–65.

¹¹⁹ John C. Lennox, *Determined to Believe? The Sovereignty of God, Freedom, Faith, and Human Responsibility* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 145, "If someone is going to be condemned because they personally failed to do something (in this case, to believe), then they must have been capable of doing it in the first place. Otherwise no guilt could attach to their action, and their condemnation would be unjust."

¹²⁰ People are saved by grace *through* faith (Eph 2:8).

¹²¹ For an extended argument that God loves every person, Christ died for every person, and God desires every person to be saved through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus, see David L. Allen, Eric Hankins, and Adam Harwood, eds., *Anyone Can Be Saved* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

¹²² Henry Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 349.

except his own voluntary refusal to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, which refusal will subject him to an aggravated condemnation.”¹²³ Rather than describing people as unable to respond to God, the confession claims that “nothing prevents” a sinner’s salvation except the sinner’s “voluntary refusal.” According to the Faith of Free Will Baptists (2013), “The call of the Gospel is co-extensive with the atonement to all men, both by the word and strivings of the Spirit, so that salvation is rendered equally possible to all; and if any fail of eternal life, the fault is wholly his own.”¹²⁴

All Christians should affirm that sin separates them from God, whom Scripture declares to be “holy, holy, holy.” It was our sin combined with his love for us (“the world”) that resulted in God giving his Son to die on the cross so that whoever believes in him will be saved (John 3:16; Rom 5:8). All Christians must also affirm that people are saved by God’s grace through faith, not by their works (Eph 2:8–9). The doctrine of total depravity, however, is sometimes defined to affirm much more than the sinfulness of humanity and the grace of God. Total depravity, when defined as total inability, insists that people can respond to God in repentance and faith only *because* they are born again. A better interpretation of the Bible, however, is that people are saved from sin and reconciled to God when and *because* they repent of their sin and believe in Jesus (see Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19; 20:21; 16:31).

Consistent with the quotations above from Hubmaier and Mullins, the whosoever will model affirms that God initiated salvation by sending Jesus as a sacrifice for the sins of all people. He desires all people to be saved, and any person who hears the message of the gospel can repent and be saved. This view in no way implies that individuals can save themselves. Rather, God convicts all people of their sin and draws all people to be saved. Those who hear the message of the gospel and respond in repentance and faith in Jesus will be saved, but those who reject the offer of salvation can blame only themselves for their lost condition.

Does God Have an Unmet Desire?

Another challenge faced by advocates of the whosoever will model is to answer this pair of questions: If God desires to save every person, then why are all people not saved? Has God failed to accomplish something he desires? In reply, Scripture indicates that only some people will be saved (Matt 7:13–14; 23:33; John 5:24). Either those people will never hear

¹²³ See the *New Hampshire Confession*, article 6, “Of the Freeness of Salvation,” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1978), 363. In 1853, J. Newton Brown added or changed the italicized portions: “Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth *but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the gospel*, which *rejection involves him in an aggravated condemnation*.” See notes on 363. Though the 1853 edition mentions depravity, both editions indict the individual sinner for rejecting the gospel.

¹²⁴ *The Faith of Free Will Baptists* 8, in *A Treatise of the Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc.* (Antioch, TN: National Association of Free Will Baptists, 2013), 10.

the saving message of the gospel (Rom 10:14, “And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”) or they will hear the gospel but never repent and believe in Jesus. Gerald Borchert, commenting on John 3:16–18, explains, “Undoubtedly God’s desire is that all might be saved (e.g., Acts 17:30–31; 22:15–16; 1 Tim 2:6), but because of human freedom or choice (‘whosoever,’ 3:16), all of humanity does not respond in believing acceptance of the Son (e.g., John 1:11–13; Rom 1:5; 10:16; 1 Tim 4:10).”¹²⁵ Tragically, some people die in their sin and are separated eternally from God. However, whether a person is born again is not decided by whether God desires that person to be saved. He loves all people, and he desires all people to be saved. Those who are unsaved either *never hear* the gospel, or they *hear and reject* the gospel. Thankfully, any person who hears the message of the gospel can repent and believe in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Both models of salvation find support among historic confessions, trustworthy theologians, and believers who love God, are filled with his Spirit, and desire to be faithful witnesses for Christ. I confess I do not fully comprehend this—or any—Christian doctrine. Perhaps the solution lies in an unknowable blend of the two models. Middle knowledge is a promising option for those interested in a hybrid solution.

Richard Fuller (1804–1876) expressed a view that was held among some Baptists in his era and, I think, held among some Christians today. He describes the two major views of salvation, as advocated by “Necessarians” and “Libertarians.” These views correspond, respectively, to the decretal theology and whosoever will models presented above. He provides explanations for both views from the same set of biblical texts, which was wise because any model of salvation must account for all Scripture and not simply the texts that seem to support its viewpoint. He roots the necessarian view in God’s decrees and sovereignty, and he grounds the libertarian view in experience and the denial that God does evil. Fuller argues that *both* are true. He compares them with two parallel lines that never meet, and he argues that neither view should be denied.¹²⁶ Fuller’s comments here would resonate with many advocates of middle knowledge.

The attempt to understand why only some people are saved reaches back to the early years of the church and has not been resolved. Though Christians have struggled in prayer and study to understand these matters, I doubt the answers will be revealed on this side of heaven. Nevertheless, the effort is worthwhile because the study can send us back to the

¹²⁵ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, NAC 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 184.

¹²⁶ Richard Fuller, “Predestination,” in *Baptist Doctrines: Being an Exposition in a Series of Essays by Representative Baptist Ministers of the Distinctive Points of Baptist Faith and Practice*, ed. Charles A. Jenkins (St. Louis: Chancy R. Barns, 1881), 479–516.¹²⁶

Scripture, allow us to learn from the interpretations of faithful Christians throughout history, and send us to our knees in praise to the one who graciously saves yet does not reveal everything about salvation.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In the early church, salvation was commonly understood as *theosis*, which refers to the view that God became a human so humans could be transformed by the Holy Spirit to become like God and participate in God forever. According to Augustine's later writings, God gives faith to and justifies selected sinners. Martin Luther emphasized justification by faith alone. The Calvinist-Arminian dialogue that crested at the Synod of Dort corresponds roughly to the decretal theology and whosoever will models of salvation presented in the chapter.

KEY TERMS

- decretal theology model
- Irresistible Grace (according to Dort)
- Limited Atonement (according to Dort)
- *ordo salutis*
- *pactum salutis*
- Perseverance of the Saints (according to Dort)
- sublapsarianism
- supralapsarianism
- *theosis*
- Total Depravity (according to Dort)
- Unconditional Election (according to Dort)
- universalism
- whosoever will model

REVIEW QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. What previous ideas about the doctrine of salvation were challenged (if any) by reading this chapter?
2. What new ideas about the doctrine of salvation were introduced (if any) by reading this chapter?
3. Which of the historical views surveyed is closer to your views on salvation, and why?
4. Which of the two models for salvation is closer to your perspective, and why? Prepare and deliver a five-minute presentation arguing for the *other* model.

SELECTED CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY SOURCES

CLASSIC

Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*.

Augustine. *A Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints*.

Hubmaier, Balthasar. *A Christian Catechism*.

The Canons of the Synod of Dort (1618–1619).

CONTEMPORARY

Allen, David L., and Steve W. Lemke, eds. *Calvinism: A Biblical-Theological Critique*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022.

Barrett, Matthew, and Thomas J. Nettles, eds. *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of Sovereign Mercy*. Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2012.

Bates, Matthew W. *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.

Keathley, Kenneth. "The Work of God: Salvation." Pages 543–600 in *A Theology for the Church*, rev. ed., ed. Daniel L. Akin. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014.

Picirilli, Robert E. *Grace, Faith, and Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation; Calvinism and Arminianism*. Nashville: Randall, 2002.