

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 25

Salvation – Metaphors, Part 1

I was recently in Malibu, California on the campus of Pepperdine University. Wow! What a view! On mountains that face the Pacific Ocean, the view cannot be beat. It is not surprising that the school's colors are blue and orange. Those are the colors you see in the evening as the sun sets over the blue ocean.

Do you think if you lived there, you would ever grow to take the view for granted? Maybe not fully, but would you begin to grow so accustomed to the beauty, that you might let a day go by without consciously stopping and thinking about the gorgeousness before your eyes? Probably. Time has a way of numbing us to things of beauty, as well as things of pain.

I think time has done some numbing also in our thinking about certain matters of faith and thought. Take “salvation” for instance. When we speak of “salvation” or of “being saved,” what do we mean? What did Paul mean? Where do those words come from, and what is their core meaning? We start there today as we study “soteriology.”

One of the fun things about learning theology is using words that are not in every day usage. I do not remember when I first heard the word “soteriology,” but I readily confess that the word rarely invades my daily conversation. The ideas in soteriology are with me daily; it is the word that gets rare usage.

Do you know the word? It is a subset of study in theology. It is soteriology that keeps theology from being simply an exercise in philosophy. Without soteriology, Christianity would be a hopeless religion. So, what is soteriology?

From our earlier classes you might recall the “-ology” means the study or processing of thought or discussion over a subject.¹ In this case, then, we consider “soteriology” as the study of “soteri,” whatever that might be.

Our source for “soteri” is a Greek noun *soteria* (σωτηρια), which comes from a Greek verb *sozo* (σωζω). The noun means “salvation, rescued, or delivered;” the verb means “to save, rescue, or deliver.” Soteriology is the study of salvation. Our class today discusses soteriology.

“Salvation” has become such a well-worn concept for many of us that we do well at the beginning of this class to consider the Greek words in a bit more detail.

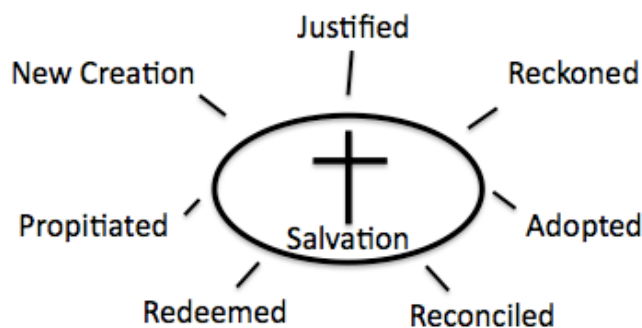
¹ See our first lesson on Pauline theology available for download at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

Paul writes of our being “*saved* by him [Jesus] from the wrath of God” (Rom. 5:9). Paul specifies we are “*saved*” by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). Paul uses the Greek words over and over. What does he mean?

Let us get a fuller idea of the meaning of the Greek *soteria/sozo* by considering some other places it is found in the New Testament. In Mark 6:56, we are told that sick people sought out Jesus, even to touch the fringe of his garments because “as many as touched it *were made well*.” Mark uses *soteria/sozo*, they were “healed” or “saved.”

In Acts 23:24, Paul’s travelling companion Luke uses *soteria/sozo* telling how Paul was brought before Felix the Governor “safely.” If one of Paul’s readers were to set down his letter and pick up the writings of Plutarch,² then he or she might read the passage where a woman is saved [*soteria/sozo*] from drowning in the sea by a dolphin! For in secular Greek usage, like in Paul and the New Testament, *soteria/sozo* means, “to deliver when there is a particularly perilous situation, a mortal danger.”³

Within this framework, Paul saw in Jesus the salvation and deliverance from a mortal danger. As Joseph had been told of Mary bearing Christ, “you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save [*sozo*] his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21). Paul explains Christ’s salvation with a number of different metaphors that all serve to explain various nuances and ways in which we can understand God’s salvation in Christ. We can see these metaphors as teaching images radiating from the core concept of salvation:



² Actually Plutarch was born around 46 A.D., so his writings were a wee bit later than Paul’s – but not by much!

³ Spicq, Ceslas, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Hendrickson Publishers 1994), v. 3 at 345.

TODAY'S ISSUES

In the center of our understanding is the cross of Christ. In this lesson, we will consider two of Paul's metaphors for salvation. This will leave us five more metaphors for coming lessons.

JUSTIFIED

In the spring of 1977, I had a chance to drive my sister's car to school. As I was leaving school, a policeman pulled me over claiming I had driven in the wrong lane. I thought he was dead wrong and decided to fight the ticket in court. I did not have a lawyer, nor did I think I needed one. Presumptive boy that I was, I was convinced I could get the officer to crumble under my withering cross-examination. I was only semi-successful; but as I explained to my Dad, if I lose, I just have to pay the ticket!

As a trial lawyer for the last 25 years, I have tried many cases since. I have learned that some cases are fairly minor affairs with little on the line. A loss is not too much to worry over. There are some other cases, however, where the stakes are much higher. Can you imagine a case where you believe in your client and yet you lose, and your client gets the death penalty? "Guilty" and "not guilty" take on a whole new perspective when the punishment can mean death!

Trials are not new inventions of America or even the British court system that birthed American justice. The Romans had trials, as did the Greeks and other early civilizations. In the Romans courts, "justice" was sought as an important societal and community virtue. Admittedly, justice was seemingly for sale at times (as it is in many societies and places today) but the concept of justice was there nonetheless.

Paul knew the court system first hand. Acts gives the accounts of Paul's incarceration in Philippi with its accusations before the courts of the city officials (Acts 16). Paul's companions were brought before the civil courts in Thessalonica paying fines as security to the city authorities (Acts 17). In Corinth, Paul was brought before the tribunal where Gallio refused to sit as judge in Paul's case (Acts 18). In Jerusalem, Paul was put to trial before the Jewish courts (Acts 22-23). Later, Paul was put on trial in Caesarea before Felix and Agrippa (Acts 24-26). From that trial, Paul lodged an appeal to Caesar that brought Paul to Rome (Acts 26-27). Paul was personally familiar with words of court! His Greek vocabulary was laden with first hand awareness of words like "guilty" and "not guilty!"

There are wonderful Greek words that express the idea of "justice" in verb forms, noun forms, and adjectives. The core Greek root for these words is *dikaios* (δικαιος) meaning, among other things, "just," "right," "well balanced" and

“lawful.” From this root we get words that mean “righteousness/justice” (*dikaioσune* – δικαιοσυνη); “a lawsuit” (*dikasia* – δικασια); “lawyering” (*dikanikos* – δικανικος) and “justification” (*dikaioμα* – δικαιομα).

A quick review of these words in Greek literature⁴ shows that the words have found their root usage and meanings in the court system. These are, by and large, legal words. Paul goes into the court system and borrows judicial language to help explain the saving work of Christ on the believer.

When Paul writes and uses this group of words, Paul generally uses the verb form rather than the noun. By this we mean that Paul most often speaks of God declaring the believer right or just as opposed to the believer being right or just on his or her own. Paul uses the Greek *dikaion* (δικαιουν). If you are following this Greek so far, then you will recognize our legal root of “just” in the *dikai* part of the word. After that part there is a Greek ending of *-oun*. When you add *-oun* to a Greek verb, it means to make, to treat, or to account one accordingly. So, the Greek *dikaion* means to treat or account one as just. It is God declaring the believer just or “not guilty” in 21st century speak. God treats the sinner as if the sinner is pure and righteous.

Paul uses this legal concept in a number of different forms as a metaphor for what has happened in our salvation. A sampling of Paul’s usage gives a good understanding of his reasons this root works well for explaining salvation.

Consider the following passages:

- **Romans 3:10** “None is **righteous** (*dikaioσ*), no, not one.”

Paul quotes the Psalms (14:1, 3 and 53:1, 3) to make his point that no one has moral righteousness. No one has true justness by one’s own merit. There is not anyone who truly can be measured against God’s standards of holiness and morality and be shown to be blemish free. A finding of “not guilty” cannot proceed from one’s own actions.

- **Romans 1:17** “For in it [the “gospel”] the righteousness (*dikaioσune*) of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous (*dikaioσ*) shall live by faith.”

While Paul will explain in Romans 3:10 that no one is “righteous” or “just” on their own merit, he does note that there are those who are “righteous” or “just” living by faith. Paul links this to God’s own “righteousness” or

⁴ See the references listed in Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford 1968) at 429.

“justness.”⁵ Paul will explain this further in Romans 3:21-26 explaining that the God who is truly just on his own makes a declaration that believers in Christ are just.

- **Romans 3:21-26** “But now the **righteousness** (*dikaiosune*) of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the **righteousness** (*dikaiosune*) of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are **justified** (*dikaioumevoi*) by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s **righteousness** (*dikaiosunes*), because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his **righteousness** (*dikaiosunes*) at the present time, so that he might be **just** (*dikaion*) and the **justifier** (*dikaionta*) of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Paul inundates this passage with legal metaphors and puns. Paul explains that God, the Judge has set out a “not guilty” declaration of righteousness and justness that is both a personal moral declaration as well as a community announcement. This is a declaration of “not guilty” that is through faith rather than a legal standard. It applies even though no one is worthy of it. This “not guilty” is a gift of God’s grace through the redemption in Jesus and his sacrificial death. Jesus’ death itself shows God’s justness because an appropriate penalty was meted out for sin. Thus, we see God the just judge declaring the believer not guilty because Christ has already paid the penalty fully and justly.

- **Romans 5:9** “Since, therefore, we have been justified (*dikaiothentes*) by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”

Paul here ties the court metaphor back into the lessons of salvation we considered last week.⁶ God is the divine initiator of salvation. Christ was God’s plan from before the creation of the world. It is God who justifies:

⁵ Actually, scholars debate exactly what Paul means by his reference to the “righteousness of God.” The grammar of the Greek (the “genitive case” is used in the Greek) can mean (1) God’s own righteousness; (2) the righteousness that God requires; (3) the righteousness that God gives; or, (4) the righteousness that originates and flows from God.

⁶ Last week’s lesson, like all our lessons, is available for download at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

“we have been justified...” It is something done for us, done to us. We are “not guilty” not through our own actions, but through the actions and declaration of God. Moreover Paul puts it in a verb tense of what has happened in the past. It is an historical event -- a declaration of “just.”⁷

As we consider these passages, we might sense that translators can be a bit frustrated trying to put Paul’s thoughts into English. In English, we have a concept of “justice” that reflects the social ideas and concerns of fairness and even handed treatment. We also have an English word “righteousness” which typically denotes an idea of personal morality. We are “righteous” when we are living right. The Greek ideas behind the *dikai* words convey both ideas -- the community “justice” and the personal “righteousness.”

It may overly complicate things (and if so, just move on to the next section!) but the same Greek root is behind the words our English translators turn into “righteous, righteousness” as well as “just, justification, and justify.” But because we have no English verb for “righteousness” it makes translators juggle through different English words losing some of the punch and word play Paul has. Consider in this sense Romans 3:26. The ESV translates it,

It was to show his [God’s] righteousness (*dikaiousunes*) at the present time, so that he might be just (*dikaion*) and the justifier (*dikaionta*) of the one who has faith in Jesus.

If we were to invent some English words to keep consistency in translating it, then we might do it as follows:

It was to show his [God’s] justness/righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just/righteous and the just-declarer/righteous-maker of the one who has faith in Jesus.

In conclusion, Paul, experienced legal man that he was, found in the court system a wonderful way to illustrate the truths that humanity has true moral guilt, but through the grace of God is given a declaration of “just” or “not guilty” because the punishment has been met already. This is past tense for the believer. God has done it.

⁷ In Romans 5:9 as well as Romans 5:1 Paul writes using an aorist passive participle. The effect is to emphasize both the historical nature/past tense of the action as well as the passive nature in that God performed the declaration on man’s behalf.

RECONCILED

For a short time in the late 1980's, I had a chance to work for a friend who I knew through church as well as through the courtroom. When I left that law firm and went to work on my own, my friend was very upset. He felt I had wronged him in leaving and try as I might; I was unable to disabuse him of this notion.

Years came and went and I was never able to reconcile with my friend. He had no trust of me, nor I of him. Two years ago, a mutual buddy of ours had come to faith in Christ. Our buddy came to us both separately and told us that we were each wrong in our perception of the other. Our mutual buddy insisted we meet over barbeque and reconcile.

Several days later, I found myself in central Texas with my friend from many years ago, my recently born again buddy, and a tangy plate of barbeque. As we set down, my estranged friend asked me, "Mark, would you say grace over our food?" I was glad to, and the walls of separation and alienation dissolved almost immediately. In the last several years, our friendship has grown deeper and closer than it ever had before. It is a rich blessing to me today that I thank God for regularly.

"Reconciliation" – what a wonderful word for those who have experienced it. It is not a new word. As long as there have been relationships, I imagine there has been a word for reconciliation. It is a word based on friendship, and it is a word that Paul uses metaphorically to explain our salvation in Christ to God.

The Greek for reconciliation is *katallage* (καταλλαγή). The word means "reestablishment of an interrupted or broken relationship, reconciliation."⁸

What is it that Paul understood that brought such a word to mind for describing salvation? As a rabbinically trained, well-studied man, Paul doubtlessly understood the difference in God's walk with man before and after the sin in the Garden of Eden. Prior to sin, God walked in the Garden in fellowship and conversation with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8-9). But with sin, mankind chose rebellion in their relationship with the divine. For God had told them not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). In sinful rebellion, man was forced to leave the garden of paradise to eek out a living among the thorns and thistles of the land (Gen. 3:16-24).

Subsequently, we read of man's constant and deliberate waywardness from God. Try as he or she might, no one again experiences the fellowship of the garden, but

⁸ Bauer, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (U. Chi. 2000) 3d ed.

then Christ comes. Jesus proclaims to his followers a relationship of friendship and kindness (John 15:12-15).

Paul saw the work of Christ as one that restored the broken relationship between humanity and God. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Paul uses this metaphor multiple times:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of **reconciliation**. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Those who are in Christ have something new – reconciliation with God. Even as Paul uses a different metaphor, certain concepts driving the metaphor are consistent with Paul’s other teachings. For example, Paul is clear that God is reconciling the relationship. This is not a restoration that comes from human initiative. “God ... reconciled us to himself.”

A second consistency is Paul’s linking the reconciliation to the work of Christ. God has reconciled us to himself “through Christ.” There was a significant work affected in the death of Christ. God “made him to be sin who knew no sin.” God did this “for our sake”, for “in him [Christ] we might become the righteousness⁹ of God.”

Paul saw his missionary activities as ones that called people to reconciliation with God. Christ destroys the harsh and very real dividing wall sin erected. We can now enjoy close and intimate fellowship with God, as opposed to being his enemies.

Toward this end Paul wrote to the Romans,

For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are **reconciled**, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received

⁹ Yes, this is the same legal metaphor discussed in the Romans passages earlier. Paul is saying that in Christ we become the justness/righteousness of God.

reconciliation. (Rom. 5:10-11).

Now, it may seem harsh to consider ourselves “enemies” of God. Most people have a high enough view of themselves that it rubs them wrong to think that God would consider them enemies. “After all,” some might say, “what did I ever do to God?” When we ask these questions, we are failing to understand the purity of God’s holiness as well as the depth of our own sinfulness. Dwell on both momentarily. What deed have you done that does not have at least a whiff of selfishness? By the same token, if God has the purity of selflessness shown by the death of Christ, an emptying of himself of divine glory to walk humbly before humanity, then should God not hate the selfishness and pride in which we wallow?

Put into John’s language, if God is light and we are darkness, what fellowship is there? Shall God take our darkness into himself? Paul (and the rest of scripture) shouts, “No!” God hates sin, hates its destructiveness, and seeks to reconcile with us through Christ who has taken away the sin. In Christ, we have fellowship on God’s terms. We go to him in holiness, not sin.

Paul constantly ties this reconciliation into the work of Christ,

For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to **reconcile** to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:19-20).

This reconciliation affects not only our relationship with God, but our relationships with each other as well. Paul told the Ephesians,

But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... that he might **reconcile** us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Eph. 2:13-16).

Our peace with God brings us together in one body. The restoration and reconciliation in Christ makes friends both vertically with the divine and horizontally with fellow believers.

NEXT WEEK

Next week, we will continue our discussion of Paul’s metaphors for salvation considering several terms that take on deeper meaning when we cast them into their first century setting.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save [sozo] his people from their sins.”* (Mt. 1:21).

“Salvation” – what a wonderful word. A word full of meaning: health, wellness, and safety. Let us make a conscious decision to not lose the beauty of this word through overuse. We have the assurance that Jesus came into this world to seek and to “save” those who were lost (Lk 19:10). Where do we fit into this? Do we attempt to stand before God based on our own merit? Do we think we have no need for salvation? We should not ignore these questions. This “guilty” or “not guilty” verdict is no mere traffic ticket. Our answers to these questions are the most important decision we will ever make.

2. *“We have been justified by his blood”* (Rom. 5:9).

We heard and learned a lot of words in law school -- words like negligence, sua sponte, and incorporeal hereditaments, *etc.*, but two of the most important words lawyers and courts ever hear are fairly simple: “not guilty.” That announcement of a jury means the person goes free.

We have an ultimate courtroom experience, Paul explained. We stand before God the judge. As a judge, God is not going to adjust his rule of law to show any favoritism or injustice. God is a just judge. He is consistent with his own nature.

But, that does not leave us under the condemnation our sins deserve. God the just and righteous judge can declare us “not guilty” by the blood of his Son given in sacrifice on our behalf. In this we stand accused, but walk away free, not guilty, by virtue of the work of Jesus.

3. *“We were **reconciled** to God by the death of his Son”* (Rom. 5:10).

Here is the set up: God made mankind and gave us every chance to have intimate fellowship with him. Our forefather Adam chose rebellion instead. We have been brought into this world under the curse Adam incurred -- the curse of sin and rebellion. With that came alienation from God. We can sense it if we try; it is that spiritual hunger and yearning for something beyond ourselves.

Here is the choice: God has taken it upon himself to offer reconciliation of our relationship. Through the death of his Son, things can be made right again. Do we choose reconciliation with God or alienation?