

Morgan, Christopher W., and Thomas R. Schreiner. *Salvation*. Theology for the People of God Series. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2024. 453pp. + 14pp. (front matter) + 55pp. (back matter).

This volume is part of a growing series (Theology for the People of God) that pairs a biblical scholar and a theologian to address major doctrines. Volumes available to date also include *The Holy Spirit* (see my review in *JBTW* 3, no. 1), *A Handbook of Theology, Humanity, Special Revelation and Scripture*, and *The Work of Christ*. Though not without its occasional quirks,¹ *Salvation* makes a valuable and often insightful contribution to the field of soteriology.

Following an introduction that frames soteriology in the larger metanarrative context of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration, Morgan and Schreiner develop their topic straightforwardly with a simple succession of chapters on ten major soteriological doctrines: union with Christ, election, calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, preservation and perseverance, eternal life and glorification. The goal of the series to integrate biblical and systematic theology is reflected in the division of each of these chapters into two (sometimes three) sections. The book's consistent organization makes it easy to follow. "Exegetical Foundations" explores the biblical-theological data for the doctrine under consideration. "Systematic Formulations" then organizes the salient features of that data into overarching systematic theological conclusions. Select doctrines (election, justification, sanctification) also include an intervening section on "Historical Reconnaissance," which examines and weighs major divergent views from a historical theological standpoint. These ten specific doctrinal foci are followed by three final overarching chapters that coordinate all the soteriological doctrines considered under three wide-angle rubrics.

Interestingly, the authors begin with the soteriological doctrine of union with Christ, "the means by which God grants all the other blessings of salvation to believers" (17). Though it is a NT doctrine, the OT sets the stage for the concept: humanity's identity with Adam, the Jews' identity with Abraham, Israel's identity with Moses, the connection between the Son of Man and the holy ones of the Most High (Dan 7). Despite Paul's distinctive emphasis on this truth in the NT, "it isn't clear that the theme is the center of Paul's thought or the most important truth for understanding his theology" (24). The authors identify John and Paul as the NT's two primary proponents of this doctrine, though in the eight pages of NT corroboration that follow, they discuss only one passage of John's (17:20–26) and five passages from Paul.

The chapter on election (chapter 2) includes a historical overview that contains these two statements on the atonement: "Universal atonement means that Jesus died to make the salvation of everyone possible. . . . Limited or definite or particular atonement means that, although universal benefits flow from the cross, Jesus dies to save the elect, not each and every person" (70). Intentional or not, it's worth noting that these two positions as stated actually do not conflict or contradict each other logically or theologically. It should also be pointed out that the unqualified inclusion of "limited

¹ The authors occasionally go out of their way to showcase international and lesser-known writers—which is a good thing, except that these citations often highlight unremarkable observations. Examples include notations from the *ESV Global Study Bible* (6, 259, 413), *Africa Bible Commentary* (87, 126, 219, 312), PhD dissertations (7), and a reference to an "unpublished master's thesis" (130).

atonement” (with all of its modern implications) as one of the canons of Dort (70) is an all-too-common mischaracterization of that point, since the original position on the atonement as stated at Dort accommodates a universal provision for the sins of all.² Things get even more interesting, however, in the “Systematic Formulations” segment. Surprisingly, the authors cite Ephesians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 1:9 (among many others) as teaching *not* individual election, but the *corporate* election of the church (77). Surprise turns to perplexity, however, when they explain that corporate election is only historical, not eternal or definitive: “God chooses via historical election the visible New Testament church as a corporate people, but not every individual in the church experiences salvation” (79). Though that initially sounds confusing, it might only mean that people can find their way into a local church who were not actually part of God’s corporate election of the true church. Poorly worded, perhaps, but so far so good—until the next page: “Historical election puts one in the community of faith but does not guarantee that one has been eternally elected for salvation” (80). Combining those statements, Ephesians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 1:9 do not teach an individual, eternal, definitive election, but a historical and corporate election that does not necessarily signify personal salvation. The muddle is further compounded when Ephesians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 1:9 are also later cited to teach pretemporal, eternal, individual election (83). The arguments for individual vs. corporate election from exegetical details are also inconsistent. Acts “speaks of election only twice, once of corporate election (18:9–10) and once of individual election (13:48)” (78)—but the reason for the difference is unclear. One might think 18:9–10 is corporate because “people” is plural; yet they argue on the same page that Romans 9:18 refers to individual election because the pronouns (“on whom” and “whom”) are singular, but that John 5:21 also refers to individual election because the pronoun (“whom”) is *plural*. Despite much helpful data and discussion regarding election, the chapter bogs down under the weight of some inscrutable inconsistencies.

The authors correctly ground regeneration (chapter 4) in OT passages such as Deuteronomy 10 and 30, Jeremiah 4 and 32, and Ezekiel 36 and 37. (Other passages that would have bolstered their position include Jeremiah 24:7 and Ezekiel 11:19; 18:31). Unsurprisingly, they insist that “*logically* regeneration precedes faith, even though *temporally* faith and regeneration occur at the same instant” (116). Later in the chapter, the authors juxtapose three possible views: “Is faith the cause of regeneration (the Arminian view), or is regeneration the cause of faith (the Calvinist view)? Or are they simply distinct pictures of salvation that are complementary and do not necessarily fit into a certain order of salvation?”—i.e., an *ordo salutis* (124–25). Curiously, they argue for *both* the second view, which assumes an *ordo salutis*, and the third view, which rejects an *ordo salutis* (125). This apparent inconsistency surfaces later in the book as well (see below).

The discussion of justification (chapter 6) is one of the longest, being one of the more complex and historically debated doctrines—not only between Protestantism and Romanism but, more recently, within Protestantism itself. Against the New Perspective, the authors argue at length exegetically and theologically for “righteousness” as conformity to a norm rather than covenant

² See Lee Gatiss, “The Synod of Dort 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: Crossway, 2013), 162–63. Cf. Raymond A. Blacketer, “Blaming Beza,” in the same volume, 141.

faithfulness, for God's righteousness as including judging righteousness rather than exclusively saving righteousness, and for salvific righteousness as forensic (declaring sinners righteous) rather than transformative (making sinners righteous). To be sure, salvation is transformative; the issue, however, is whether the biblical words "justification" or "righteousness" *mean* to "be transformed, made righteous." Morgan and Schreiner correctly say no. The forensic/declarative view of justification raises its own problem, however. How can a righteous God declare sinners righteous without compromising his conformity to his own standard of righteousness (175)? The solution lies in the combined concepts of propitiation and imputation (176–78; 194–201). The authors round out their exegetical defense of justification with a lengthy defense of the harmony between Paul and James (178–83).

Adoption (chapter 7) has been traditionally explained in terms of ancient cultural practice (whether Roman or Jewish) and widely defined as the legal placement of a believer as God's son and heir. The authors bypass that cultural discussion and take a holistic approach, utilizing the term *adoption* in a broad theological sense ("invited to be members of God's family," 210) and corroborating the doctrine with a generic range of passages, including those that depict God as the believer's Father, believers as God's children, and Jesus as their brother, as well as regeneration passages such as John 1:12 (210; cf. 114, 121) and all five NT *huiothesia* passages. In the authors' view, adoption is a distinct but alternative parallel soteriological image to regeneration: "Scripture also describes people becoming God's children in another way: regeneration" (214). Regeneration is necessary because people are spiritually dead; adoption is necessary because people are spiritually enslaved. Thus, they define adoption this way: "God frees slaves to sin and welcomes them into his own family as sons and daughters" (214). At the same time, our adoption "is an already-but-not-yet reality. Believers are now adopted, but the fullness of their adoption will be consummated . . . when believers are granted new bodies at the resurrection" (213). This is an overall improvement over cultural theories, but a more exegetically exhaustive and theologically thorough explanation is that adoption refers to God's act of reversing our alienation and restoring our ontological sonship (as originally created in God's image) via a two-event process: regeneration (impartation of eternal spiritual life) and resurrection (impartation of eternal physical life).³

Morgan and Schreiner rightly differentiate between three categories of sanctification: *definitive* (aka "positional"; believers are declared holy at salvation), *progressive* (the process of becoming more like Christ throughout life), and *final* (aka "eschatological"; our complete transformation to Christlikeness in glorification). After exploring the exegetical evidence for each of these kinds of sanctification, the authors furnish a historical survey (237–49) of five major evangelical views of sanctification within the context of Christian living—Lutheran, Wesleyan, Keswick, Pentecostal, and Reformed—followed by an evaluation of each view (249–52). The Lutheran position tends toward a static view that essentially denies progressive sanctification. The next three of these views share a common flaw, a "two-stage" soteriology that involves "justification followed by a second blessing, whether entire sanctification (Wesleyanism), a deeper life encounter (Keswick), or Holy Spirit baptism

³ See Andrew Minnick's three-part series, "Bringing Many Sons to Glory: The Theological Intersection of Sonship and Resurrection in Redemption and Christology," *JBTW* 1, no 2; 2, no. 1; 2, no. 2.

(Pentecostalism)” (251)—all of which the authors argue are not consistent with biblical teaching. Instead, they defend a Reformed view of sanctification but one with an interesting twist. Citing both Anthony Hoekema and John Frame, the authors advocate a Reformed view that “rejects the traditional Reformed understanding of the *ordo salutis*” and instead views all the “aspects of the application of salvation” as “unified under the heading of ‘union with Christ’” (251). This explains the topic and placement of the first chapter (“Union with Christ”) but seems inconsistent with their earlier defense of at least a partial *ordo salutis* in arguing for the logical priority of regeneration to faith (116, 124–25). Later the authors clarify, “We agree with both [John] Murray and [Anthony] Hoekema that the various doctrines that constitute the application of salvation should be distinguished, and so we have devoted separate chapters to them. However, we side with Hoekema concerning the priority of union with Christ and the inadvisability of formulating a strict logical order for the doctrines” (345). Again, the only exception appears to be the logical priority of regeneration to faith.

Their treatment of glorification (chapter 10) includes a distinctive emphasis that is as exegetically obvious as it is routinely overlooked—the concept of *present, progressive glorification*. “We must not allow Paul’s overwhelming emphasis on future glory to obscure” the fact that “2 Cor 3:18 teaches that ‘already’ the Spirit works in believers so that they increase progressively in glory until the return of Christ” (336–37). Like sanctification—and linked to it—our glorification is past (John 17:22), present (2 Cor 3:18), and future (Rom 5:2).

In chapter 11 (“Salvation and Theological Themes”), the authors (re)view the ten soteriological doctrines covered in the book through a variety of theological lenses (e.g., Trinity, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, kingdom of God, covenant). Together with chapters 12 (“Salvation and the Christian Life”) and 13 (“Salvation and the Glory of God”), this triad admirably concludes the book with a theological, a practical, and a doxological emphasis.

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