

The
Threefold
— UNDERSTANDING —
— ♦ of ♦ —
Salvation

♦
*God's Eternal Purpose,
the Messiah's Redeeming Work,
and the Believer's Living Experience*

♦ ————— ♦
A Theological Study



THEONOUMENON
God's Eternal Purpose



MESSIANIC PHENOMENA
The Messiah's Redeeming Work



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
The Believer's Living Experience

♦ ————— ♦
Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

Pastor Emeritus, Th.B., A.B., D.D

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The Threefold Understanding of Salvation

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DEDICATION

*To the people of HELP, Inc.,
whose faithful hunger for the Word of God
has sharpened and shaped these pages.*

“For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever. Amen.”

— Romans 11:36

Soli Deo gloria.

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Preface

Salvation is the greatest subject that can occupy the human mind. It is greater than any philosophical question, any political debate, or any scientific inquiry, for salvation concerns the eternal destiny of the human soul and the glory of the God who made us. It was with this conviction that the theological studies gathered in this volume were first delivered to the HELP, Inc. fellowship, a community of lay-leaders and pastors hungry for the whole counsel of God. I have taught them for many years, and I have never come to the end of the subject.

The argument of this book is simple but far-reaching. Salvation is not merely a transaction that occurs at the moment of conversion. It is a reality so vast and so deep that it must be understood in three dimensions at the same time. There is a dimension that belongs to God alone, hidden in His eternal mind before the foundation of the world. There is a dimension that was enacted in history through the person and work of Jesus the Messiah. And there is a dimension that becomes real in the life of every believer through the indwelling Spirit. Miss any one of these three, and your theology of salvation will be truncated. Hold all three together, and you will begin to see salvation as Scripture presents it: as the most magnificent act of the Triune God.

The three chapters of this study take their names from terms that I have found useful in theological instruction. The *Theonoumenon* is a compound drawn from the Greek words for God (*theos*) and for that which is thought or conceived in the mind (*noumenon*). It names salvation as it existed in the eternal purpose of God before a single moment of history had unfolded. The *Messianic Phenomena* takes its second word from the Greek *phainomena*, “things that appear.” It names the concrete, historical acts of Jesus Christ through which that eternal plan appeared among us and was brought to fulfilment. And the *Personal Existence and Experience* names the living reality of that salvation in the life of the one who has been born again by the Spirit.

These are my own terms, and I offer them as tools rather than as technical inventions. They are meant to help a pastor, an elder, or a thoughtful believer keep the whole of salvation in view at once. Readers will notice that I return to them again and again. That repetition is deliberate. A truth that is held in three dimensions needs to be looked at from all three sides, and often.

This is not abstract theology. Every page of this study has been written with the believing reader in mind, the person who wants not only to know about salvation but to live within it more fully, to worship more deeply, and to proclaim it more faithfully. Each chapter closes with questions for reflection, and the book closes with questions of a more personal kind. I ask you not to hurry past them. May God be pleased to use these studies to that end.

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Introduction

The English word “salvation” translates a rich biblical vocabulary. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew root *yāsha*’ carries the sense of deliverance, rescue, and safety. In the New Testament, the Greek *sōtēria* extends that range to include healing, preservation, and ultimate eschatological rescue from the wrath of God. (“Eschatological” simply means having to do with the last things, the end toward which God is bringing all of history.) What both Testaments share is the conviction that salvation is not a human achievement but a divine act. It is something God does, not something we produce.

Yet the full scope of what God does in salvation is rarely grasped at once. In Scripture, salvation is presented as simultaneously past, present, and future. We have been saved: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). We are being saved: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). And we shall be saved: “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (Rom. 5:9). Salvation encompasses both the eternal decree of God and the daily experience of the believer. It is at once cosmic in its scope and intimately personal in its application.

This study approaches salvation through three lenses, each capturing a distinct dimension of this great subject. The first lens is the *Theonoumenon*, salvation as it exists in the mind and eternal purpose of God. Isaiah records the LORD’s own declaration: “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done” (Isa. 46:9–10). Salvation was not an afterthought. It was the *Theonoumenon*, the idea of God before time began, and everything that follows in history is the working out of what was already settled in His mind.

The second lens is the *Messianic Phenomena*, salvation as it was enacted in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah. What God purposed in eternity, He accomplished in history. Luke records of Jesus on the road to Emmaus: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). The whole of the Old Testament was a witness waiting to be fulfilled, and the Messianic Phenomena is the name I give to that fulfilment as it appeared in the life, death, resurrection, and glorification of Christ.

The third lens is the *Personal Existence and Experience*, salvation as it becomes real in the life of the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the realm of the new birth, of justification and sanctification, and of the daily walk in the Spirit. Paul describes that walk in the letter to the Romans: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). He gives it its deepest expression in the letter to the Galatians: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). In the chapter titles that follow I shorten this third lens to the Personal Experience, but the fuller name reminds us that salvation touches the very existence of the believer, not only his feelings.

These three dimensions are not alternatives, and they are not stages that one leaves behind. They are complementary and inseparable. The first chapter, *The Theonoumenon: Salvation in the Mind of God*, considers how salvation was purposed, pictured, promised, prophesied, procured, preached, and preserved. The second chapter, *The Messianic Phenomena: Salvation through the Messiah*, follows the Son of God from the incarnation, through His obedient life, atoning death, and resurrection, to His ascension and continuing reign. The third chapter, *The Personal Experience: Salvation in the Believer's Life*, traces the new birth, the Spirit-led Christian life, and the goal toward which every believer is moving, which is full conformity to Christ in the resurrection.

A word about method may help the reader. I have tried to let Scripture speak in its own words, and so I quote the text rather than merely pointing to it. I have tried also to keep this study within the stream

of the Reformed and evangelical tradition, in which I have been taught and have taught others, and from which I draw gladly on Augustine, Calvin, Berkhof, and Warfield, among many others. But no tradition is the final authority here. The question at every point is simply what the Scripture says. If I have succeeded, the reader will close this book not merely better informed but more grateful, because gratitude is the proper response to a salvation that was planned before we were born, accomplished on our behalf, and applied to us by the Spirit of God.

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

— Romans 11:36

CHAPTER 1

The Theonoumenon: Salvation in the Mind of God

“I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”

— Isaiah 46:9–10

Before the first ray of light pierced the primordial darkness, before the first word of creation was spoken, before there was a world to save or a human race to redeem, salvation existed. It existed in the mind of God. This is the mystery and the majesty of what I call the *Theonoumenon*: the eternal, pre-temporal idea of God concerning the rescue of His people. Salvation was not a divine contingency plan. It was a reality in the infinite mind of the LORD before the foundation of the world.

To grasp this is to be liberated from every anxiety about whether your salvation is secure. If salvation originated in the mind of God, in His perfect, unchanging, sovereign purpose, then it does not depend on the constancy of your feelings, the consistency of your performance, or the circumstances of your life. It depends on the immutability of God Himself. Scripture says it plainly: “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). God does not change His mind, and a salvation that rests in His mind rests on the firmest ground there is.

We must be careful here, because the human mind cannot comfortably hold what Scripture asks of it. When I speak of salvation existing in the mind of God, I do not mean that it was a mere thought, a possibility that God entertained and might have set aside. In the Bible, the thoughts and counsels of God are not idle. Of all the things we know, they are the most effective. “The counsel of the LORD stands forever,

the plans of his heart to all generations” (Ps. 33:11). What God conceives, He accomplishes. For this reason the Theonoumenon is not the weakest dimension of salvation but the strongest, since it is the root from which the other two grow.

The reader may ask how a human being can speak of such things at all, since we were not there. The answer is that we speak of them only because God has told us. The prophet Isaiah reminds us of the distance between our minds and His: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9). We would know nothing of the Theonoumenon if it had not pleased God to reveal it. And He has revealed it, in the plain words of Scripture, so that we might be humbled by it and comforted by it. In this chapter we follow the movements by which that hidden purpose came into the light: salvation purposed, pictured, promised, prophesied, procured, preached, and preserved.

A. Salvation Purposed: The Eternal Decree

The first movement of the Theonoumenon is divine purpose. Before the world existed, God purposed salvation. Paul writes to Timothy that God “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Tim. 1:9). The phrase “before the ages began” is decisive. God’s saving purpose is not located in time at all. It is pre-temporal, eternal, and absolute. Notice also what Paul sets against it: “not because of our works.” If the purpose came before the ages, it came before anything we could do, and nothing we do later can either create it or cancel it.

Theologians call this purpose the *eternal decree* of God, which is His settled and unchangeable plan for all that comes to pass, including the salvation of His people. The decree is not an arbitrary fate, and it is not a cold calculation. It is the free, wise, and loving determination of a Father who chose to have a family. Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians with an outburst of praise that says exactly this: “Blessed be the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph. 1:3–4). Every word in that sentence deserves a long pause. We were chosen. We were chosen *in him*, which means in Christ and never apart from Him. We were chosen before the foundation of the world. And we were chosen for a purpose, which is holiness.

What does it mean for God to purpose something? It means that in the infinite depths of His Trinitarian life, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit deliberated and determined that sinners would be rescued. The Father planned, the Son agreed to come, and the Spirit agreed to apply. Peter shows us that the cross was never an emergency measure. Redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot,” we are told that Christ “was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you” (1 Pet. 1:19–20). John says much the same in the book of Revelation, where the names of the redeemed are written “before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain” (Rev. 13:8). The Lamb and the book belong together, and both belong to eternity.

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”

— Ephesians 1:11

Paul binds the whole chain of salvation to this purpose in the eighth chapter of Romans: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom. 8:29–30). Notice the tense of the last verb. Paul does not say that those whom He justified He *will* glorify. He says that He glorified them, as though the whole matter were already finished. From the standpoint of God’s eternal purpose, it is.

Here the doctrine of election, which many find difficult, becomes a doctrine of comfort. If you are in Christ, your salvation was not a late decision on God's part, made in response to something He foresaw in you. He purposed you in love. Paul describes the case of Jacob and Esau, whose destinies were declared "though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad." He gives the reason: "in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls" (Rom. 9:11). God's purpose does not depend on us. For that reason it is both humbling and safe. It humbles us because it leaves no room for boasting, and it keeps us safe because it leaves no room for our failure to undo it.

I do not wish to say more about the decree than Scripture says, and I do not wish to say less. It is enough for the believer to stand where the apostles stood, with open hands and a full heart, and to say with Paul that all of this is "to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:6). The first thing we learn about our salvation is that it began with God, in God, and for God. Everything else that we will say flows out of that single truth.

B. Salvation Pictured and Promised: Types, Shadows, and Covenants

The second and third movements of the Theonoumenon are closely related. God both pictured and promised salvation throughout the unfolding of redemptive history. He did not keep His purpose locked in heaven. He let it be seen, and He let it be heard. The Old Testament, from its first chapters to its last, is the record of God teaching His people, in pictures and in promises, what He had decided to do for them in Christ.

1. Salvation Pictured

A picture is a visible teaching, and God filled the Old Testament with visible teaching. Every sacrificial lamb in Israel's worship was a picture of the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. John the Baptist makes the connection himself when he sees Jesus coming toward him: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

(John 1:29). The people of Israel had watched lambs die for centuries. John tells them that the One who is standing before them is the reality to which all those lambs had been pointing.

Theologians call such pictures *types*. A type is a person, event, or institution in the Old Testament that God designed beforehand to foreshadow Christ and His work. The Passover lamb, whose blood on the doorposts turned away the destroyer, was a type. The bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness was a type. The Davidic king enthroned in Zion was a type. And every high priest who entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement was a type of the great High Priest who would offer Himself once for all. The writer to the Hebrews makes this explicit: Christ “entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:11–12). The earthly priests had to return year after year, which showed that their work was a picture and not the thing itself. Christ entered once, and it was finished.

We should not think of the types as clumsy attempts that God later improved upon. They were exactly what He intended them to be, which is shadows cast backward from the coming reality. A shadow is not an inferior substitute for the object. It is a faithful outline of it, and it tells us that the object is on its way. When we read the Old Testament in this light, the Tabernacle, the sacrifices, and the festivals stop being a puzzle and become a portrait. They were the Theonoumenon made visible in history.

2. Salvation Promised

The promises operated alongside the pictures. If the pictures taught the eye, the promises taught the ear. The first promise of salvation comes immediately after the first sin, in the curse that God pronounces on the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). Theologians call this the *protoevangel*, the first announcement of the gospel. In a single verse God promises that a

descendant of the woman will crush the serpent's head, at the cost of a wound to His own heel. Every later promise is an unfolding of that one.

"For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory."

— 2 Corinthians 1:20

The promise grows wider as it moves forward. To Abraham God said, "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). A man from one family would be the channel of blessing to all families. Centuries later, through Jeremiah, God promised a covenant of a different kind, one that would reach the heart: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33). He added the promise on which every sinner depends: "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34).

These promises were not wishful thinking, and they were not general expressions of hope. They were covenant promises, which means that God bound Himself by oath to do what He said. A covenant in Scripture is a solemn bond in which God pledges Himself to His people. As God was progressively unveiling the content of His eternal purpose, He was also pledging Himself to carry it out. The promises were the Theonoumenon breaking into history in the form of words that could be heard, believed, and held onto through long ages of waiting. Paul declares that every one of them is fulfilled in Christ, who is the "Yes" to them all.

C. Salvation Prophesied, Procured, Preached, and Preserved

The last four movements of the Theonoumenon carry the purpose of God out of the Old Testament and into the experience of the church. They move from announcement, to accomplishment, to proclamation, and finally to protection. Taken together they show that God does not only decide to save. He sees the work through from beginning to end.

1. Salvation Prophesied

The prophets of Israel announced the content of the Theonoumenon to a people who lived in anticipation of its fulfilment. Isaiah's Servant Songs draw an astonishing portrait of the coming Redeemer: a Servant who would be despised and rejected, who would bear the iniquities of His people, and who would make His soul an offering for sin. "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Seven centuries before the cross, the prophet describes it with a clarity that still takes the breath away.

What is most striking is that Isaiah attributes the suffering of the Servant to the will of God. "Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief" (Isa. 53:10). The cross was not a defeat that God turned into a victory after the fact. It was the plan. This was prophecy in the service of the Theonoumenon: the unveiling, in advance, of what God had purposed and would in due time perform. Prophecy does not cause the future. It discloses a future that God has already determined.

2. Salvation Procured

At the cross, salvation moved from decree to deed, from purpose to performance. To procure something is to obtain it at a cost, and the New Testament is clear about the cost. Paul writes that in Christ, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). The Theonoumenon became atonement. The eternal purpose was fulfilled in time. Peter and the other apostles, preaching on the day of Pentecost, saw both sides of the event at once. They told the crowd that Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," and that He was crucified "by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). God's plan and human wickedness met at the cross, and the plan prevailed.

I will say more about the atoning work of Christ in the next chapter, where it belongs to the Messianic Phenomena. Here I wish only to observe that the procuring of salvation was not a separate undertaking

added to the plan. It was the plan, carried out. Every drop of blood shed on Calvary was shed in accordance with a purpose that had been settled before the foundation of the world. Nothing was left to chance, and nothing was wasted.

3. Salvation Preached

Salvation, once procured, was then preached. God did not purpose to save His people and then keep the news to Himself. He ordained that the gospel should be carried to the ends of the earth by those whom He sends. Paul puts it with remarkable boldness: “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). Preaching is not an afterthought either. It is the appointed means by which the hidden purpose of God reaches the ears of those whom He has chosen.

This is why the doctrine of election never makes the preaching of the gospel unnecessary. It makes it certain. The same God who ordained the end ordained the means. “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). When a pastor opens the Scriptures and calls sinners to Christ, he is not interfering with the eternal counsel of God. He is carrying it out. The preacher is the voice of the Theonoumenon in the present moment.

4. Salvation Preserved

The last movement is preservation, which is God’s keeping of His people until the end. Here the Theonoumenon returns to where it began, since the purpose that started in eternity will finish in eternity. Jesus Himself states the Father’s will in these words: “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” (John 6:39). Not one of those whom the Father has given to the Son will be lost. This is the Son’s own account of His mission, and He does not describe it as a hope. He describes it as a will that will be done.

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

— Philippians 1:6

The Theonoumenon, then, is not merely a theological abstraction. It is the bedrock of Christian assurance. The work that God began in you was not begun by you, and therefore it cannot be ended by you. Your salvation did not start when you first believed. It started in the mind of God before the foundation of the world. And what He has purposed, He will perfect. Paul can therefore end the whole matter with a question that has no answer but silence: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). Here is the first dimension of salvation, and it is the ground on which the other two stand.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 1

1. The concept of the Theonoumenon asserts that salvation was purposed by God before the foundation of the world. How does this truth challenge any view of salvation that locates its origin in the human will or decision? What Scriptures would you bring to bear in explaining this to someone who struggles with the doctrine of election?
2. Consider how the pictures and promises of the Old Testament functioned as communal anticipation of the Theonoumenon. How might a deeper awareness of this continuity between the Testaments enrich the worship and preaching life of your church? What would change in your community’s engagement with the Old Testament if it were read consistently as pointing toward Christ?
3. The Theonoumenon declares that your salvation was not an afterthought but an eternal purpose. How does this truth speak to any doubts, fears, or insecurities you have about your standing before God? Take a moment to articulate, in your own words, why the eternity of God’s saving purpose should be the ground of your daily confidence and worship.

CHAPTER 2

The Messianic Phenomena: Salvation through the Messiah

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

— Luke 24:27

The Theonoumenon, God’s eternal saving purpose, did not remain locked in the counsels of the Godhead. It pressed into history. It took on flesh and bone, wept real tears, bled real blood, and walked out of a real tomb on the third day. The *Messianic Phenomena* is the name I give to this historical enactment of the Theonoumenon: the full scope of Jesus the Messiah’s saving work, from His incarnation to His glorification, through which everything God had eternally purposed was accomplished in time and space. The word “phenomena” means things that appear. What had been hidden in the mind of God now appeared before the eyes of men.

On the road to Emmaus, the risen Christ gave two bewildered disciples the interpretive key to all of Scripture: “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). The whole Old Testament, He declared, was a preparatory unfolding of the Messianic Phenomena. Every page pointed toward Him. The disciples had been reading the same Scriptures as everyone else, and they had missed the center of them. It was not until the Lord Himself opened the text that the pictures and promises of the first chapter came together in a single face.

There is a reason why I insist on calling these events *phenomena* and not merely *doctrines*. Christianity is not first of all a set of ideas about God. It is a report of things that happened. Paul gives the gospel in the form of events: “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with

the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4). Salvation, in this dimension, has a date, a place, and witnesses. It can be preached because it occurred. In this chapter we follow the Messiah through three movements: the incarnation, His ministry up to the ascension, and His glorification.

A. The Incarnation: God Enters History

1. The Word Made Flesh

The first and foundational movement of the Messianic Phenomena is the incarnation, the act by which the eternal Son of God took to Himself a true human nature. John states it with astonishing economy: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The eternal Son, the second Person of the Holy Triune Godhead, did not cease to be God when He became man. He added humanity to His deity, and He did so without confusion and without loss.

This is the most astonishing claim that has ever been made about any person in human history. The writer to the Hebrews says of the Son that “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). The one who upholds the universe by the word of His power became a helpless infant, born of a virgin in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire. Paul describes the descent in the language of a hymn: Christ Jesus, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6–8). He did not empty Himself of deity. He emptied Himself of the privileges and the visible glory that belonged to it, and He took on the lowliness of a servant.

The incarnation was not merely a strategy for communication, as though God wished only to show us what He is like. It was a theological necessity. For Christ to be the mediator between God and man, He had to be both God and man. As Paul writes, “For there is one God, and

there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). A mediator who was only God could not represent us, and a mediator who was only man could not save us. In the person of the Son, both are joined, and a way was opened between a holy God and a guilty race.

The incarnation also answers the problem of death. Death is the wage of sin, and the Son could not break its power without entering the realm where it rules. The writer to the Hebrews explains why He took our nature: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb. 2:14–15). The Son became what we are so that He could die the death that we deserve. A God who had remained at a distance could have pitied us, but only a God who came near could have redeemed us.

2. Born under the Law

The incarnation was also the beginning of an obedience. Paul says that the Son was sent into the world under a particular condition: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4–5). The phrase “born under the law” is crucial. The Son placed Himself in the position of those He came to save, subject to the demands of the law of God. Where Adam had failed, where Israel had failed, Jesus succeeded.

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

— Galatians 4:4–5

Crucially, Christ’s life was not simply a waiting room before the cross. His public ministry included His perfect obedience to the law of God, which theologians call His *active obedience*. This lifelong conformity to the will of the Father is the positive righteousness that God reckons to the

believer in justification. The apostle sets the two heads of humanity side by side: “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). Adam’s disobedience became ours, and Christ’s obedience becomes ours also. This transfer is what the Reformed tradition calls *imputation*, the act by which God counts the righteousness of Christ to the account of the believer.

Without the active obedience of Christ, forgiveness alone would leave us only where Adam started, innocent but untested. The gospel promises more than that. Paul writes, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Our sin was reckoned to Him, and His righteousness is reckoned to us. The exchange could not have been made by one who had any sin of His own, and so the sinless life of Jesus is not a mere background to the gospel. It is part of the gospel.

B. His Pre-Ascension Ministry: The Resurrection and Commission

Between His incarnation and His ascension, the Messiah carried out a ministry that included teaching, healing, and the calling of disciples, but that moved steadily toward three great events: His death, His resurrection, and His commissioning of the church. Each of these belongs to the Messianic Phenomena, and each is necessary to it.

1. The Obedient Life and the Atoning Death

The obedience of Christ did not stop with the keeping of the law. It reached its climax at the cross. Where the active obedience fulfilled what the law commanded, His *passive obedience* bore what the law threatened against sinners, which is the curse of death. He described His own mission in these terms: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). A ransom is the price paid to set a captive free, and the price was His own life.

Peter writes that “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). The one who had known no sin bore the sins of others, and the wrath that should have fallen on His people fell on Him. This is what the church has called *propitiation*, the turning away of God’s righteous anger through the sacrifice of a substitute. I will say here only that it was the cross that gave meaning to the whole of the Messiah’s life. The writer to the Hebrews says, “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12). A single sacrifice, offered once, never to be repeated.

This sacrifice was not partial, and it was not provisional. The writer to the Hebrews adds, “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). The word “perfected” does not mean that believers are already sinless in experience. It means that their standing before God has been completed by an offering that cannot be improved. Paul draws the pastoral conclusion in the form of a question: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). If God has given the greatest gift, He will not withhold the lesser ones. The cross is the believer’s guarantee that the Father is for him.

2. The Resurrection

The resurrection is the linchpin of the Messianic Phenomena. If Christ has not been raised, Paul declares with devastating logic, then “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). The whole structure of salvation would collapse. But the apostle does not stay in the conditional: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). The word “firstfruits” tells us that His resurrection is the first piece of a larger harvest. Those who belong to Him will follow Him out of the grave.

The resurrection is God’s public vindication of His Son. It is His declaration that the sacrifice was accepted and that sin has been atoned for. It was the Father’s answer to the cry of the cross. Every dimension

of the Messianic Phenomena is guaranteed by the empty tomb, which is why the apostles never preached the cross without the resurrection. Paul binds the two together in one sentence, saying of Jesus that He “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). He died because of our sins, and He rose because our justification had been secured.

“He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

— Romans 4:25

3. The Commission

In the forty days before His ascension, the risen Lord appeared to His disciples and taught them. Luke tells us that “he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). The same disciples who had fled at His arrest were now given understanding, and with it a task. He sent them out with the words: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20).

This pre-ascension ministry is not an epilogue to the story of salvation. It is the moment at which salvation is declared victorious and its proclamation is entrusted to the church. Notice that the commission ends with a promise: “I am with you always.” The Messiah who is leaving is also the Messiah who stays. He goes up in body so that He may be present in power, and His church is sent into the world with the assurance that it does not go alone.

C. His Glorification: Ascension and Ongoing Reign

1. The Ascension

The climactic movement of the Messianic Phenomena is the glorification of Christ. Forty days after the resurrection, Christ ascended bodily into heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father. Luke describes the scene: “And when he had said these things, as they were looking on,

he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). The ascension is not a mere departure. It is an enthronement. The Son who humbled Himself in Philippians 2 is the Son who is now exalted, and the human nature He took at Bethlehem now sits in glory.

This matters for us because the one who sits on the throne is one of our own. He is our Brother and our Representative. Having made purification for sins, the writer to the Hebrews says, He “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3). The work is finished, and the Worker is enthroned. Nothing remains to be added to the sacrifice, and nothing remains to threaten the one who trusts in it.

The writer to the Hebrews invites the weary believer to look at this enthroned Christ: “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). Notice the order. The cross came first, and the throne came after. The path that He walked is the path that the church is called to follow, through suffering to glory, and the One who walked it ahead of us now waits at the end of it.

2. Prophet, Priest, and King

From His seat of glory, Christ exercises three offices that continue to secure and apply salvation, which the older theologians called His *threefold office*. As Prophet, He speaks to His people through His Word and Spirit. As Priest, He intercedes: “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). As King, He rules over all things for the sake of the church, for God “put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22). The ascended Christ is not an absent Christ. He teaches, He prays, and He governs.

The glorification of Christ is not the conclusion of the Messianic Phenomena but its ongoing reality, the living Lord continuing to accomplish, through His Spirit, what He secured on the cross and validated in the resurrection. The whole scope of the Messianic

Phenomena, which includes incarnation, obedient life, atoning death, resurrection, and glorification, is the temporal enactment of the eternal Theonoumenon. Every movement was necessary, and none can be omitted. If the incarnation is dropped, there is no mediator. If the obedient life is dropped, there is no righteousness to impute. If the death is dropped, there is no atonement. If the resurrection is dropped, there is no justification. If the glorification is dropped, there is no intercession. Together they make a salvation that is complete.

And so we come to the reason that believers can rest. The decree of God is secure in eternity, and the work of Christ is finished in history. Both are outside of us. Neither depends on the strength of our faith, since both rest on the faithfulness of God and of His Son. But they are not yet in us, and that is the subject of the third chapter. For salvation to be ours, what was purposed by the Father and performed by the Son must be applied by the Spirit.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 2

1. The Messianic Phenomena presents Christ's entire life, and not merely His death, as significant for salvation. How does the active obedience of Christ in His public ministry contribute to the salvation of the believer? What difference does it make whether justification includes only forgiveness or also the imputation of Christ's righteousness?
2. Christ's glorification is described as an ongoing reality in which He continues to intercede as High Priest and rule as King for the benefit of His church. How should this truth shape the corporate worship, the prayer life, and the sense of mission in your congregation?
3. The resurrection is the hinge on which all Christian faith swings. Reflect on the last week of your life. In what situations did you live as though the resurrection were true? In what situations did you functionally live as though death had the final word? What would resurrection-shaped living require of you this week?

CHAPTER 3

The Personal Experience: Salvation in the Believer's Life

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

— Galatians 2:20

The Theonoumenon reveals what God purposed. The Messianic Phenomena reveals what Christ accomplished. But both remain external to the individual until the Spirit makes them personally real. The third dimension of salvation is the *Personal Existence and Experience*, the realm in which what was decreed in eternity and accomplished in history becomes the living possession of the individual believer. A salvation that is planned and accomplished but never applied would save no one. The Father planned it, the Son procured it, and the Holy Spirit brings it home.

John Calvin called the Holy Spirit the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to Himself, and I know of no better summary. Everything in this chapter turns on that union. The believer is not merely given the benefits of Christ at a distance, as one might receive a gift sent through the mail. He is joined to Christ Himself, and the benefits come with the Person. *Union with Christ* is the biblical name for this joining. It means that the believer is so united to Christ that what is true of Christ becomes true of him: he dies with Him, rises with Him, and lives by Him.

The Apostle Paul is the supreme biblical theologian of this personal dimension. In Romans he unfolds the logic of the believer's union with Christ in death and resurrection: "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). In Galatians 2:20 he reduces the whole of the Christian life to a single astonishing claim: "I have been crucified with Christ." And in

Philippians he describes his life's consuming passion, which is to be found in Christ, to know Him, and to attain the resurrection from the dead. Following Paul, we will consider the new birth, the Christian life, and the goal toward which that life is moving.

A. The New Birth: Conversion and Union with Christ

The first movement of the Personal Experience is the new birth, what Jesus, in His conversation with Nicodemus, called being “born again” or “born from above.” He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Nicodemus was a religious man, a teacher of Israel, and Jesus told him that religion was not enough. What he needed was not improvement but a beginning.

1. Regeneration: A Sovereign Act of God

The new birth is not merely an emotional experience or a decision of the human will. It is a sovereign creative act of God. Paul compares it to the first day of creation: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). The God who spoke light into a dark universe now speaks light into a dark heart. A person does not give birth to himself. Neither does a dead man choose to rise. Paul says that God “made us alive together with Christ” even when we “were dead in our trespasses” (Eph. 2:5). The theological word for this act is *regeneration*, the work of the Holy Spirit by which He gives new spiritual life to a person who was spiritually dead.

God had promised this long before Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. Through Ezekiel He said: “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek. 36:26–27). Here the pictures and promises of the first chapter reach their goal. The heart of stone is removed and the Spirit is given, and the result is a people who walk in obedience. It is the Spirit's work from first to last, and Paul says in his letter to Titus that God “saved

us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

2. Faith, Repentance, Justification, and Adoption

The new birth involves several distinguishable but inseparable acts of God: regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, and adoption. These are not stages through which the believer passes one after another in conscious experience. They are the different facets of a single, instantaneous divine act. In the moment of new birth, the believer is simultaneously regenerated, justified, and adopted into the family of God. The new life awakened by the Spirit expresses itself at once in faith and repentance, which are turning from sin and trusting in Christ, and faith is the hand that receives what God gives.

Justification is God’s judicial act of declaring the sinner righteous, on the ground of the righteousness of Christ reckoned to him. Paul writes that believers “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). The result is peace: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). The believer’s status before God is not the result of his progress. It is already settled by the work of another. And *adoption* adds a further privilege, since the one who is justified is also brought into the household as a son.

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

— John 1:12–13

Notice how John places side by side what we receive and where it comes from. Those who “did receive him” are the same as those “who were born ... of God.” Reception is real, and the birth is real, but the birth is the cause. I mention this because many believers are anxious about whether they believed enough or in the right way. The answer of Scripture is that the faith which receives Christ is itself the fruit of the

birth from above. If you have come to Christ, it is because God first brought you to the light.

The new birth is also the point at which the believer is brought into union with Christ, so that what happened to Christ is counted as having happened to him. Paul says to the Colossians, “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). Here is a mystery that the world cannot see and the believer himself cannot always feel. Your life is hidden, which means that it is kept safe. It is hidden *with Christ*, which means that it is as secure as He is. And it is hidden *in God*, which means that no power in heaven or on earth can reach it without passing through Him first. To know this is to be freed from the anxious task of holding yourself together.

B. The Christian Life: Being Led by the Holy Spirit

The second movement of the Personal Experience is the ongoing Christian life, what Paul describes in Romans 8 as life “according to the Spirit.” The new birth is the beginning and not the end of the personal experience of salvation. A child that is born must grow, and the Spirit who gave the life now leads the one who has received it.

1. No Condemnation, and the Spirit’s Help

Everything in the Christian life begins with a settled verdict: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). The believer does not live under the threat of judgment. He lives under the care of a Father. This is the difference between the obedience of a slave, who obeys in order to be accepted, and the obedience of a son, who obeys because he has been accepted. The first is driven by fear, and the second is drawn by love.

The Spirit does not abandon the believer to his own resources. He leads: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). He helps in weakness: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). And He works all things together for the believer’s good:

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Notice the final phrase of that verse, “called according to his purpose.” We have come full circle. The purpose of the first chapter is the ground of the comfort in the third.

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

— Romans 8:14

2. Sanctification: Christ Living in the Believer

Galatians 2:20 captures this life with particular precision: “The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” The Christian life is not self-generated religious effort. It is Christ living in and through the believer by His Spirit. This is what Paul means by *sanctification*, the lifelong work of the Holy Spirit by which the believer is progressively made holy. It is not self-improvement but Spirit-wrought transformation into the likeness of Christ: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Here a necessary caution must be given. To say that sanctification is the work of the Spirit is not to say that the believer is passive. Paul writes, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12–13). The believer works because God works. The command is real, and so is the enabling. The two are never set against each other in Scripture, and we should not set them against each other either. This guards against two opposite errors. *Legalism* tries to earn God’s favour by obedience. *Antinomianism* treats grace as a licence to sin. The gospel avoids both, because the same Spirit who justifies also sanctifies.

You are sanctified by the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead. Paul says it plainly: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also

give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). There is power available to the believer that is nothing less than resurrection power. It does not remove suffering, struggle, or failure, but it guarantees that they will not have the last word. As Paul puts it, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Even the good works were prepared beforehand, and the Theonoumenon reaches all the way down to the details of the daily walk.

The Spirit uses means. He does not sanctify the believer in a vacuum, apart from the ordinary habits of the Christian life. He works through the Word: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). He works through prayer, and through the fellowship of the church. Luke describes the first believers in Jerusalem in these terms: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). These were not optional extras to their faith. They were the channels through which the Spirit of God fed and strengthened the new life. The believer who neglects them should not be surprised if his growth is slow, and the believer who loves them will find that the Spirit meets him there.

C. The Goal: Full Conformity to Christ in the Resurrection

The third movement of the Personal Experience is eschatological. The ultimate goal of personal salvation is full conformity to the image of Christ in the resurrection. This is the point toward which the whole movement of salvation tends, from the counsel of God before the ages to the glorified body of the believer on the last day.

1. Pressing On

Philippians records Paul’s remarkable confession. He counts everything as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, and his desire is to know Him: “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the

dead” (Phil. 3:10–11). The personal experience of salvation is aimed at the resurrection. Paul does not claim that he has already arrived. “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14).

The believer is not static; he is being progressively transformed. The new birth is the beginning, and glorification is the end. Between them lies the life of sanctification, of suffering, of growth in grace, and of deepening knowledge of Christ. And this pressing on is not anxious striving but joyful pursuit, the response of one who has been laid hold of by Christ and who knows that Christ will bring to completion what He has begun. Paul says in the same chapter that he presses on “to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil. 3:12). He runs because he has been caught.

2. Glorification

Glorification is the final act of salvation, in which the believer is raised and made like Christ in body and soul, free forever from sin and death. John gives us a glimpse of it in his first letter: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). The believer will see what he now believes. What the Spirit has begun in the heart will be completed in the body, and the resurrection of Christ, the firstfruits, will be followed by the harvest.

Meanwhile, the security of the believer rests on the same God who began the work. Jesus promises, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28). The one who was chosen before the ages is kept through the ages, and the one who is kept through the ages will be glorified at the end. Nothing in the chain is broken. Paul’s own summary is that “those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30), and on that ground a pastor can tell a frightened believer that the work of God is not unfinished.

You were born again. You are being sanctified. You shall be glorified. This is not your project; it is God's, and He does not leave His projects unfinished. The three dimensions meet in you. What God purposed before the world, Christ accomplished in history, and the Spirit applies to you today, until the day when faith gives way to sight.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 3

1. Paul's description of the new birth presents regeneration as a sovereign act of God rather than a human achievement. How does this understanding of conversion protect against both legalism (trying to earn salvation) and antinomianism (treating salvation as a licence for sin)? What theological guardrails does the doctrine of the new birth provide?
2. Romans 8 presents the Spirit-led life as the normal, expected reality for every believer. In what ways does your church community encourage one another toward conscious, daily dependence on the Holy Spirit? What practices might be cultivated to make dependence on the Spirit the lived norm?
3. Philippians 3 describes the Christian life as a relentless, joyful pursuit of greater knowledge of Christ. Honestly assess your current pursuit: where is it most alive? Where has it grown cold? Identify one specific step you will take this week to press on toward knowing Christ more deeply.

Conclusion

We began this study with the conviction that salvation is the greatest subject the human mind can contemplate. Having traced it through three dimensions, the Theonoumenon, the Messianic Phenomena, and the Personal Existence and Experience, I find that conviction has, if anything, deepened. Salvation is not a simple thing. It is the most complex, most costly, and most glorious act that has ever been accomplished in the universe. And yet it is also the most personal, since it reaches into the individual soul and makes the love of God an experienced reality.

The Theonoumenon reminds us that our salvation is as old as God's eternal purpose. We were loved before we were born, chosen before the foundation of the world, and secured in the mind of a God who does not change His mind. The Messianic Phenomena reminds us that this eternal purpose was not a mere intention but a costly accomplishment. The Son of God became man, lived in our place, died for our sins, rose for our justification, and now reigns as the living Lord who intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father. The Personal Existence and Experience reminds us that all of this has been made real in us by the Holy Spirit, and that it is being worked out through every day of our lives as we are led by the Spirit, conformed to the image of Christ, and pressed toward the glory that awaits.

Together, these three dimensions form an integrated, gloriously unified vision of salvation. They cannot be separated without distortion. A Theonoumenon without a Messianic Phenomena would be divine intention without historical accomplishment. A Messianic Phenomena without a Theonoumenon would be a Christ without a cosmic purpose. A Personal Experience without either would be religious feeling without theological ground. All three together constitute the full biblical gospel, and a church that holds all three will be a church that is humble, confident, and joyful.

Let me say a final word to the pastor and to the lay-leader. When you counsel a troubled person, you will find that his difficulty usually lies in one of the three dimensions. The anxious believer needs to hear again of the Theonoumenon, that his salvation rests on the unchanging purpose of God. The guilty believer needs the Messianic Phenomena, the finished work of Christ on his behalf. The weary believer needs the Personal Experience, the present help of the Spirit who intercedes for him. If you can name which of the three he is missing, you will know where to take him in the Scriptures.

In the end, all of this must lead us to worship, as it led Paul. After laying out the great plan of salvation in the letter to the Romans, he does not close with a summary. He closes with a doxology: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom. 11:33). A theology of salvation that does not end in wonder has not yet understood its subject. The three dimensions of salvation are not only truths to be held. They are reasons to bow, and to sing, and to give thanks.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!” (Ps. 111:10). Wisdom begins with knowing the God who saves. May this study have deepened your knowledge of Him, not merely as an intellectual achievement, but as a living encounter with the God who purposed your salvation before time began, accomplished it in the person of His Son, and is daily applying it through His Spirit. He is worthy of all praise. He is worthy of all trust. He is worthy of all worship.

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

— Jude 24–25

Soli Deo gloria.

Personal Questions and Challenges

On the Theonoumenon and the Messianic Phenomena

1. Do we truly believe that God knows our salvation from its start to its end, and that He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion? What circumstances in your life most challenge this confidence, and how does the doctrine of the Theonoumenon speak to those specific challenges?
2. How is your salvation related to Christ, not abstractly, but personally? Reflect on each movement of the Messianic Phenomena and articulate how each one is directly relevant to your standing before God today.
3. The Messianic Phenomena declares that Christ is currently reigning and interceding for you. What would change in your prayer life if you lived with a more vivid awareness of this ongoing reality?

On the Personal Experience of Salvation

1. How do we live and experience our salvation on a daily basis? In what areas of your life is the reality of the new birth most evident? In what areas does it feel most distant? What is the Spirit saying to you through that honest assessment?
2. What does being led by the Holy Spirit look and feel like in your specific life circumstances? How do you discern between your own impulses, cultural pressures, and the genuine leading of the Spirit?
3. Let us live our lives for His glory and the good of our fellow human beings. Identify one specific person in your life whose flourishing you can actively pursue this week as an expression of the salvation you have received. What will you do, concretely, for that person?

Glossary

Active Obedience: The perfect keeping of God's law by Christ throughout His earthly life. His obedience is counted as righteousness to everyone who trusts in Him.

Adoption: The act of God by which a believer is received into His family as a son or daughter, with all the privileges of a child and heir.

Antinomianism: The error of thinking that, because we are saved by grace, God's law no longer matters and sin has no serious consequences for the believer.

Covenant: A solemn bond in which God pledges Himself to His people, binding Himself by promise to do what He has said.

Eschatological: Having to do with the last things, the end toward which God is bringing history, including the resurrection of the body and the new creation.

Eternal Decree: God's wise, free, and unchangeable plan, made before the world began, for everything that comes to pass, including the salvation of His people.

Glorification: The final act of salvation, when the believer is raised and made like Christ in body and soul, free forever from sin and death.

Imputation: God's act of counting something to a person's account. Our sin was counted to Christ, and the righteousness of Christ is counted to the believer.

Justification: God's act of declaring a sinner righteous, forgiven and accepted, on the ground of the righteousness of Christ and received by faith alone.

Legalism: The error of trying to earn God's favour, or to keep it, by our own obedience instead of resting on the finished work of Christ.

Messianic Phenomena: The term used in this book for salvation as it appeared in history, namely the incarnation, obedient life, atoning death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus the Messiah.

Passive Obedience: Christ's willing submission to suffering and death, by which He bore the penalty that the law pronounces on sinners.

Personal Existence and Experience: The term used in this book for salvation as it becomes real in the life of the believer through the Holy Spirit, from the new birth to final glory.

Propitiation: The turning away of God's righteous anger against sin, accomplished through the sacrificial death of Christ, who bore that anger in the place of sinners.

Protoevangel: The first announcement of the gospel, found in God's promise in Genesis 3:15 that the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent's head.

Regeneration: The work of the Holy Spirit by which He gives new spiritual life to a person who was spiritually dead. It is also called the new birth.

Sanctification: The lifelong work of the Holy Spirit by which a believer is progressively made holy and conformed to the likeness of Christ.

Theonoumenon: The term used in this book for salvation as it existed in the mind and eternal purpose of God before time began. It combines the Greek words for God and for that which is thought.

Threefold Office: The three roles of Christ as Prophet, who teaches His people, as Priest, who offered Himself and intercedes for them, and as King, who rules over all things.

Type: A person, event, or institution in the Old Testament that God designed beforehand to foreshadow Christ and His work, such as the Passover lamb.

Union with Christ: The spiritual bond, made by the Holy Spirit, by which a believer is joined to Christ so that what is true of Christ becomes true of the believer.

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About the Author

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar is a Pastor Emeritus who holds the degrees of Th.B. (Bachelor of Theology), A.B. (Bachelor of Arts), and D.D. (Doctor of Divinity). He has devoted his life and ministry to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the rigorous theological formation of God's people, and the equipping of pastoral leaders for faithful and effective ministry in church and society.

Pastor Bal served for many years as a pastor and theological educator, and has been a central figure in the work of Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP, Inc.), a parachurch ministry committed to equipping the whole people of God for faithful service across every sphere of life. His monthly theological lectures to the HELP, Inc. fellowship have addressed the most foundational questions of the Christian faith, and these studies, expanded, deepened, and formatted for print, have shaped the theological works he continues to write.

His theological formation reflects sustained engagement with the whole of the Reformed and evangelical tradition. Among those whose thought has most shaped his own are Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Louis Berkhof, Benjamin B. Warfield, Oscar Cullmann, Herman Dooyeweerd, Karl Barth, Paul Jewett, Francis Schaeffer, R.C. Sproul, and Ravi Zacharias. He reads every theological question through the lens of the whole counsel of God, and has spent a lifetime teaching others to do the same.

The present work, *The Threefold Understanding of Salvation*, represents Pastor Bal's most comprehensive treatment of soteriology as a unified, three-dimensional whole. By tracing salvation through the eternal purpose of God (the Theonoumenon), its historical accomplishment in Christ (the Messianic Phenomena), and its personal application by the Spirit, this study offers believers and pastors alike a framework for understanding salvation in its full biblical scope.

Other theological works by the author:

Spiritual Unity and Personal Diversity in Christ

Why God Did Decree and Allow Evil to Exist

What the Christian Church Should Be

The Reformed Theological Paradigm

The Holy Loving Triune Lord God

The Seven Loci of Dogmatics

Vital Words Related to Salvation

The Athanasian Creed Understood by Faith

Biblical Salvation: A Study in Soteriology

Comparing and Contrasting Calvinism and Arminianism

Divine Election unto Salvation

In Everything, Give Thanks to God

The Seven Churches of Revelation

The Main Subjects of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses

Our Attitude Towards Wealth

The Five Illustrations of Divine Truths

The Reformed Theological Summary of Life

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Doctrines of Divine Grace Part II

Paul's Summary of His Message in the Ministry

Six Calvinistic Schools on Soteriology

The Seven Loci of Christian Theology

The Thinking Process of the Christian Mind

Millennium in the Bible

He lives with his beloved wife, Estrella. He is the father of Dr. Ellazar and Zarelle Grace. He continues to preach, teach, write, and intercede for the reformation and renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ, until the day when faith gives way to sight and the knowledge that is now partial becomes the knowledge that is full.

Soli Deo gloria.