

Liberty Theological Seminary

The *Ordo Salutis*  
with Reference to Romans 8:29-30

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## Introduction

No single or simple definition of salvation has ever been unanimously proffered by the church of Jesus Christ. Simply put, “Salvation is the application of the work of Christ to the lives of humans.”<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, there is little that can be simply said about the infinite work of Christ on behalf of His creation, and particularly, His people.

Charles Ryrie writes that

Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, is one of the grandest themes in the Scriptures. It embraces all of time as well as eternity past and future. It relates in one way or another to all of mankind, without exception. It even has ramifications in the sphere of the angels. It is the theme of both the Old and new Testaments. It is personal, national and cosmic. And it centers on the greatest Person, our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Charles Hodge refined his doctrine of salvation as necessarily including the plan of salvation, the person and work of Christ, and the Holy Spirit’s application of the atonement.<sup>3</sup> William G.T. Shedd even more narrowly considered the doctrine of soteriology to include only Christ’s work and the Spirit’s application.<sup>4</sup>

The study of salvation itself, or *soteriology*, is derived “from two Greek words, *soteria* and *logos*, meaning, ‘the doctrine of salvation.’”<sup>5</sup> Inside of that doctrine of salvation, the *ordo salutis*, or, order of salvation, exists and can be defined as, “the application of salvation.”<sup>6</sup> In greater detail, it can be described as, “the process by which the work of salvation, wrought in Christ, is subjectively realized in the hearts and lives of

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<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), p. 902.

<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), p. 319.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), 2:313.

<sup>4</sup> William T.G. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1889-94), 2:353.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 609.

sinner. It aims at describing in their logical order, and also in their interrelations, the various movements of the Holy Spirit in the application of the work of redemption.”<sup>7</sup>

Fundamentally, the *ordo salutis* may be rightly interpreted as “a list of the events in which God applies salvation to us...”<sup>8</sup> No such complete order of every event of salvation’s application to humans is clearly outlined as a step-by-step process in any scriptural text, however, such an ordering of “the progress of God’s plan of salvation”<sup>9</sup> does in fact, exist in Romans 8:29-30. This *ordo salutis* is a valid mechanism for explaining the application of the doctrine of salvation to God’s people. It is also a means by which the people of God may rejoice in the amazing wisdom and care of an all-sufficient, saving God. Such a system may even be compiled as “a list of the events,” though not necessarily as sequential as much as logical. The reason such a list is logical, though not essentially chronological is because,

When we speak of an *ordo salutis*, we do not forget that the work of applying the grace of God to the individual sinner is a unitary process, but simply stress the fact that various movements can be distinguished in the process, that the work of the application of redemption proceeds in a definite and reasonable order, and that God does not impart the fullness of his salvation to the sinner in a single act...The question may be raised, whether the Bible ever indicates a definite *ordo salutis*. The answer to that question is that, while it does not explicitly furnish us with a complete order of salvation, it offers us a sufficient basis for such an order.<sup>10</sup>

Texts like Romans 8:29-30 do assemble some aspects of the *ordo salutis* and offer unique insight into the way in which God saves sinners. Even then however, such an ordering exists not simply to satisfy human curiosity or to completely unveil God’s redemptive actions but rather to divinely help finite creatures better understand,

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<sup>7</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), pp.415-416.

<sup>8</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 669.

<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), p.494.

<sup>10</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 416.

appreciate and propagate the sovereignly mysterious work of God on behalf of his covenant people. By its presence, theologians and Christians alike are better able to delineate the existence of and difference in, the sole work of God's saving grace, man's essential part in the human salvation experience; as well as the past, present and future elements of God's redemptive activity, particularly amongst humans.

For example, some aspects of this way of salvation concern what *man does*, though only in God's strength (faith and repentance), whereas other aspects concern what *God does* (regeneration and justification). Some aspects are *judicial* acts (justification), whereas other aspects concern the moral and *spiritual renewal of man* (regeneration and sanctification). Some aspects are instantaneous actions (regeneration, conversion of the crisis type, definitive sanctification) while other phases are *continuing* actions (progressive sanctification, perseverance)."<sup>11</sup>

### **A Definition of the *Ordo Salutis***

"In 1737 Jacob Carpov, a Lutheran theologian, coined the phrase *ordo salutis* (literally, order of salvation) to describe what we are now discussing."<sup>12</sup> Thus, *ordo salutis* is a Latin term intended to define and delineate the steps or stages that demonstrate God's saving activity before, in and after time. Richard A. Muller interprets the *ordo salutis* as, "A term applied to the temporal order of causes and effects through which the salvation of the sinner is accomplished....The actual arrangement of the several elements of the *ordo*, i.e., calling, and so on, carries from system to system."<sup>13</sup>

John Murray stated, "There are good and conclusive reasons for thinking that the various actions of the application of redemption...take place in a certain order, and that

<sup>11</sup> Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> G.N.M. Collins, "Order of Salvation," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), p.

<sup>13</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1985), p. 215.

order has been established by divine appointment, wisdom and grace.”<sup>14</sup> Robert Reymond is even more specific. He writes, “No single verse of Scripture mentions every act and process in the *ordo salutis* but a careful collation of the teachings of several New Testament passages will yield an order of application made up of ten basic aspects or parts.”<sup>15</sup> Wayne Grudem also lists ten specific steps and then defines them as,

1. election (God’s choice of people to be saved) 2. the gospel call (proclaiming the message of the gospel) 3. Regeneration (being born again) 4. Conversion (faith and repentance) 5. Justification (right legal standing) 6. adoption (membership in God’s family) 7. Sanctification (right conduct of life) 8. Perseverance (remaining a Christian) 9. death (going to be with the Lord) and 10. Glorification (receiving a resurrection body).<sup>16</sup>

That the *ordo salutis* is logical and not sequential is easily understood when one perceives that “The application of salvation to God’s people has its roots in God’s eternal decree.”<sup>17</sup> Election or God’s choosing, most certainly occurred outside of time, “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). The final stage, glorification also occurs after human time ceases. In addition, several aspects of the salvation process occur simultaneously and are so essentially intertwined that one cannot exist without the other.

Accordingly, Herman Bavinck wrote that “These benefits [involved in our salvation] can be distinguished but cannot be separated; like faith, hope and love they form a triple cord which cannot be broken.”<sup>18</sup> In this, it is best understood that the various experiences enjoyed by those who place faith in Christ and receive the gracious benefit of the atonement may be distinguished from one another but can never be truly separated from each other. For instance, justification as “a judicial act of God...is an

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<sup>14</sup> John Murray. *Redemption-Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 98.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 704.

<sup>16</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 670.

<sup>17</sup> Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 689.

instantaneous and not a continuing work...[that occurs] when a man believes....at the moment of belief when faith, which is its condition is experienced,<sup>19</sup> but sanctification, which is ongoing throughout a believer's lifetime, also begins at the exact same moment of justification.

“We should think, then, not of an order of salvation with successive steps or stages, but rather of a marvelous work of God's grace – a way of salvation – within which we may distinguish various aspects.”<sup>20</sup> Offering no statement concerning election's place in the order, except his initial numbering, Grudem notes “that items, 2-6 and part of 7 are all involved in ‘becoming Christian.’ Numbers 7 and 8 work themselves out in this life, number 9 occurs at the end of this life and number 10 occurs when Christ returns.”<sup>21</sup> Such simultaneous actions add to the evidence that the *ordo salutis* is logical and not necessarily chronological, even though some aspects of its application do occur in a certain frame of time. Too, terms like “regeneration, faith, conversion, renewal, and the like, often [in the Bible] do not point to successive steps in the way of salvation but rather summarize in a single word the entire change which takes place in man.”<sup>22</sup>

The whole of Scripture definitively exposes these redemptive principles of an *ordo salutis* in a logical, though not necessarily sequential order and never fully in one text. Still, Romans 8:29-30 exists as an exception to the lack of evidence for a sequential *ordo salutis*. It does not contain all the rudiments most normally associated with salvation's order. It does, however, possess some commonly acknowledged elements of

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<sup>19</sup> James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Hanford: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1887), pp. 395-404.

<sup>20</sup> Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 670.

<sup>22</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 3*, p. 682.

the *ordo salutis*. It also presents the order logically as well as sequentially, when addressing those applications that do occur in time. Still, Romans 8:29-30 offers light on the subject, proves that such an order exists and offers insight into the basic elements of such a subject. Beginning in eternity past, it also presents a sequential ordering of God's redemptive actions that eventually enter into time and then extend into eternity future.

### **The Text of Romans 8:29-30**

Now that the existence of an *ordo salutis* has been established, the text of Romans 8:29-30 and its implications for such an order can be examined. For many, Romans is "The most profound book in existence" (Coleridge). Cathedral of the Christian faith (Godet). The chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel" (Luther).<sup>23</sup> Carson and Moo suggest that "no greater work of theology has ever been written."<sup>24</sup> Concerning the *ordo salutis* in particular, it may rightly be said that "The Bible nowhere explicitly sets out such an order, though Rom. 8:29-30 may be considered as an approach to such a definitive statement."<sup>25</sup> In Romans 8:30, Professor Murray particularly sees calling, justification and glorification as the Pauline *ordo salutis*.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, although not possessing all the elements commonly suggested as belonging to the *ordo salutis*, Romans 8:29-30 does present a definitive, logical, ordering of God's redemptive activity.

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<sup>23</sup> Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 247

<sup>24</sup> D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), p. 391.

<sup>25</sup> Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), p. 316.

<sup>26</sup> Murray, *Redemption*, pp. 100-102.

Foreknowledge (8:29a) is the first element in the Pauline *ordo salutis*. “Redemption began with God’s foreknowledge.”<sup>27</sup> In salvation, God does and must initiate the relationship between Himself and fallen man “for no one seeks for God” (Romans 3:11). Yet the idea of God’s foreknowledge is not limited only to what God knows in advance but what God ordains to happen in the future. His foreknowledge is His foreordination. “God’s foreknowledge is not a reference to His omniscient foresight but to His foreordination.”<sup>28</sup>

In Acts 2:23, Peter declared, “This Man, [Jesus] delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.” Since, ‘foreknew’ unequivocally refers to ‘whom’ the Father foreknew, it must be conceded that the Father ordained ‘who’ would participate in the next ‘step’ in Paul’s salvation order.

Because saving faith is foreordained by God, it would have to be that the way of salvation was foreordained, as indeed it was... ‘Predetermined’ is from *horizo*, from which we get the English *horizon*... The basic idea of the Greek term refers to the setting of any boundaries or limits. ‘Plan’ is from *boule*, a term used in classical Greek to designate an officially convened, decision making counsel. Both works include the idea of willful intention. ‘Foreknoweldge’ is from the noun form of the verb translated **foreknew** in our text. According to what Greek scholars refer to as Granville Sharp’s rule, if two nouns of the same case (in this instance, ‘plan’ and ‘foreknowledge’) are connected by *kai* (‘and’) and have the definite article (the) before the first noun, but not before the second, the nouns refer to the same thing. (H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* [New York: Macmillan, 1927], p. 147). In other words, Peter equates God’s predetermined plan, or foreordination, to his foreknowledge.

Paul’s *ordo salutis* then, begins in eternity past with God decreeing to whom salvation would come to pass in time. “According to Romans 8:29, God foreknows people, not merely the events surrounding them. When Scripture uses the verb *know* of

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<sup>27</sup> MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, p. 494.

<sup>28</sup> MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, p. 495.

people, it conveys the idea of “God’s loving purpose. It refers to His eternal decree.”<sup>29</sup>

Since foreknowledge begins in eternity past wherein time did not exist, complete sequential occurrence actually impossible to place on a time-line. Nevertheless, such an order does exist as necessarily logical and does possess some sequential elements.

This is because God’s foreknowledge is an all-encompassing, eternal omniscience equal to an ordained purpose. As such, it necessarily incorporates every other aspect of the *ordo salutis* presented in Romans 8:29-30. In that regard, God’s predestination, call and justification of believers are also from eternity but actualized in time at the moment of faith. In this regard it is truly logical while simultaneously possessing sequential aspects. Such apparent antinomy is always present when discussing the eternal God.

For, God’s knowledge was always perfect, so that He finds out nothing new, to become the occasion of a new plan. His wisdom was always perfect, to give Him the same guidance in selecting means and ends. His power was always infinite, to prevent any failure, or successful resistance, which would cause Him to resort to new expedients. His character is immutable; so that he will not causelessly change His own mind. There is therefore nothing to account for any addition to His original plan...As the whole of God’s *scientia simplicis intelligentiae*, was present to Him from eternity, a reason is utterly wanting in Him, why any part of the decree should be formed later than any other part.<sup>30</sup>

Whomever it is the Father foreknew, He also predestined (8:29b). “*Proorizo* (predestined) means literally to mark out, appoint, or determined beforehand. The Lord predetermined the destiny of every person who will believe in Him.”<sup>31</sup> In Ephesians 1:4, Paul wrote that God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world...” In the next chapter of Romans, Paul uses Isaac and Ishmael as examples of God’s foreknowledge and predestination. There he wrote that the Father’s choosing was “though they were not

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<sup>29</sup> Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, p. 181.

<sup>30</sup> R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, (St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Company of St. Louis, 1878), p. 215.

<sup>31</sup> MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, p. 497.

yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls..." (Romans 9:11). "God does not choose believers for salvation on the basis of who they are or of what they have done, but on the basis of His sovereign grace. For His own reasons alone, God chose Jacob above Esau (Romans 9:13)."<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, the call of God to salvation, upon an individual's life is determined solely by God's foreknowledge and predestination, for Paul next reinforces God's ordering of salvation by stating that those whom God has foreknown, He has also predestined and also called (8:30a). "Although God's calling is also completely by His initiative, it is here that His eternal plan directly intersects our lives in time."<sup>33</sup> It is also at this point, that the *ordo salutis* may be said to exist sequentially with regard to its application to humans. In this regard, Robert Reymond considers God's call to be "the initiatory act in the *ordo salutis*..."<sup>34</sup> According to Charles Hodge, the call of God includes a declaration of God's plan to save humans, God's promise to save anyone who will agree to God's plan, the command to believe, and an exhibition of the reasons to believe.<sup>35</sup>

Justification is the next element in the Pauline scheme of God's *ordo salutis* and it is the second aspect of what God does in the concept of human time. What is essential to recognize is that every justified human being who is called was also predestined, and also foreknown by God; hence evidencing a logical, if not, insofar as time is concerned, a sequential order. Yet the point is that Paul reveals a divinely ordained *ordo salutis* by which God effectively carries out His intent to redeem a people to Himself.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 499.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 498.

<sup>34</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 713.

<sup>35</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:641-642.

“The doctrine of justification means that in God’s sight the ungodly man, now ‘in Christ,’ has perfectly kept the moral law of God, which also means in turn that ‘in Christ’ he has perfectly loved God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and his neighbor as himself.”<sup>36</sup> By it, God forensically declares a human being righteous in His sight. Justification is a legal term by which a sinner is determined to possess a right and righteous standing before God Who is the Judge.

Justification is the act of a judge acquitting one who is charged with crime. It is the opposite of condemnation... Justification is a higher blessing of grace, than pardon. The latter frees from the penalty due to sin, but it does not fully restore the lost favor of God. A pardoned criminal, and a just man who has committed no crime, stand on different ground.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Paul addresses the subject of glorification as the last aspect in his divinely inspired *ordo salutis*. “The promise of final glory was no uncertain hope as far as Paul was concerned. By putting the phrase **these He also glorified** in the past tense, the apostle demonstrated his own conviction that everyone **whom He justified** is eternally secured.”<sup>38</sup> Salvation ends, where salvation began, with God in eternity and is wholly based, even linearly, on the fact that it began, not in time with man, but out of time with God. “God purposed to glorify the same group He predestined, called, and justified (Romans 8:30). This daring statement could not be made if any one of that group could lose his salvation. If so, then the ones whom He justified would not be the same number as the ones He glorified. But the text says they will be the same.”<sup>39</sup> Such an ending is a necessary conclusion to God’s *ordo salutis*, lest everything that precedes it, exist in vain.

When Christ redeemed us he did not just redeem our spirits (or souls) – he redeemed us as whole persons, and this includes the redemption of our bodies. Therefore the

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<sup>36</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 742.

<sup>37</sup> John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1990), p. 265.

<sup>38</sup> MacArthur, *Romans 8:1-8*, p. 500.

<sup>39</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 382.

application of Christ's work of redemption to us will not be brought to that state of perfection for which God created them. In fact the redemption of our bodies will only occur when Christ returns and raises our bodies from the dead...Moreover, when Paul traces the steps in the application of redemption, the last one he names is glorification.<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusion

In summary, it is true that no single text of Scripture contains all the commonly accepted elements of an *ordo salutis*. Nevertheless, such an order does exist in Scripture. Although not containing every principle of such an order, Romans 8:29-30, beginning with foreknowledge and concluding with glorification, clearly evidences God's logical ordering of salvation toward humanity. It even demonstrates certain aspects that may be assigned a sequence in human time. This is because God is both timeless and in time.

Most importantly however, it must be remembered "that theological preoccupation with this topic has often led to a greater concern for the various steps in our salvation than for the riches of salvation itself."<sup>41</sup> God's end in redemption is that "God is glorified by every aspect of salvation."<sup>42</sup> The *ordo salutis* may be essential for human beings to somewhat enter into God's mind concerning redemption but it is not intended to drive men away from affection for the God Who provides salvation, by an obsession for the tools the master Craftsman has chosen to utilize in His redemptive activity. Therein, even the *ordo salutis* is intended to honor a God of salvation and order.

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<sup>40</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 828.

<sup>41</sup> G.C. Berkouwer. *Faith and Sanctification*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 25-26.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel A. Akin, ed. *A Theology for the Church*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), p. 764.

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