

S T U D Y G U I D E



The Drama of Redemption

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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The Eternal Drama

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

When we look at the entire scope of the history of redemption, we understand that there is a structure in which this activity unfolds. The structure that we find in Scripture is a covenantal structure. God makes covenants with Noah, with Abraham, and with David. In the New Testament a new covenant is instituted. These, however, are historical covenants. Another covenant was established from all eternity. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul discusses this eternal covenant of redemption.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to define the “covenant of redemption”
2. To be able to summarize the covenantal structure of the history of redemption
3. To identify and define the roles played by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the eternal covenant of redemption

QUOTATIONS

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

—The Westminster Confession of Faith, 3.1

The covenant is an expression of God's will, not man's, and man must listen to its terms, trust God that they are holy and just and good, and order his life accordingly.

—J. Gresham Machen

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. This series is titled *The Drama of Redemption*.
1. When we use the term *drama*, we usually think of something that we observe on the stage involving actors, lines, and action.
 2. We do not mean to suggest that God is involved in a play.
 3. We are using the term *drama* because action is unfolding that covers the whole span of history, and actors are involved—both human actors and a Divine Actor.
 4. The word *drama* also makes us think of something that evokes a passionate response from those who are engaged in it; it is not boring or dull.
- B. When we look at the scope of this drama, we understand that the structure in which the biblical history of redemption unfolds is called the “structure of the covenant.”
1. Virtually all theological schools of thought recognize that the Scriptures are filled with references to covenants.
 2. We see, for example, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, and the new covenant.
- C. Different kinds of covenants are presented in the Bible, and the first one we must examine is usually referred to as the “covenant of redemption.”
1. This covenant is not found explicitly in the historical sections of Scripture.
 2. The “covenant of redemption” refers to a covenant that was established from all eternity.
 3. The only parties involved in this covenant were the personal members of the Godhead—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 4. From all eternity an agreement existed within the triune God.
 - a. This may seem obvious, but there are those who perceive the work of Christ as an attempt to change the Father’s mind.
 - b. In the early church, the Gnostic heretic Marcion believed that the God of the Old Testament was a mean and nasty demiurge and that Jesus redeemed us from Him.
 - c. Marcion created an expurgated version of the New Testament, and this in turn forced the church to clearly declare the canon of the New Testament.
 5. God is like the playwright; from all eternity He planned the drama of redemption, and He had only one plan.
 6. Creation itself was part of the eternal plan of God, and all three members of the Godhead were active in carrying out this plan.
- D. Our concern here is not primarily with creation; it is with redemption—the drama of the salvation of a fallen creation.
1. From all eternity, God planned not only the creation but the redemption of that creation, which is a Trinitarian work.
 2. The impetus for redemption begins with the Father.

- a. The Father is the superordinate member of the Godhead, and the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate in terms of working out the plan of salvation.
 - b. This does not mean that the Son and the Spirit are in any way inferior to the Father in power, being, and dignity; it means that in terms of this action, the Father is the initiator.
 3. The Son, from all eternity, agrees with the Father to enter history at a point in time, empty Himself of His glory, assume the nature of humanity and become incarnate, submit Himself to the laws of the Father, and become obedient even unto death on the cross.
 - a. There is a covenant between the Father and the Son, to which the Son is a willing party.
 - b. From all eternity, it was God's plan that the Son would come to redeem His people, and the Son carries out that plan; He enacts the drama.
 4. The Holy Spirit is also actively involved in the work of redemption.
 - a. The Holy Spirit overshadows Mary and makes it possible for her to bear a child who is God incarnate.
 - b. The Holy Spirit anoints Jesus at His baptism.
 - c. The Holy Spirit revives the corpse of Jesus.
 - d. The benefit of the work of Christ is applied to us by the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates us and sanctifies us.
 - e. The Holy Spirit empowers us for ministry, convicts us of sin, helps us to pray, and ultimately glorifies us in heaven.
- E. The church really began in covenant among the members of the Godhead; we must understand that it began in eternity and is destined for eternity.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When we look at the scope of this drama, we understand that the structure in which the biblical history of redemption unfolds is called the _____.
 - a. Dispensation of redemption
 - b. New covenant
 - c. Dispensational structure
 - d. Structure of the covenant
2. What is the name of the covenant that was established from all eternity?
 - a. The old covenant
 - b. The covenant of redemption
 - c. The covenant of works
 - d. The covenant of grace

3. What was the name of the Gnostic heretic in the early church who created his own expurgated canon of the New Testament to support his view that the God of the Old Testament was a mean demiurge?
 - a. Montanus
 - b. Arius
 - c. Marcion
 - d. Origen

4. The impetus for redemption begins with _____.
 - a. The believer
 - b. The Holy Spirit
 - c. Jesus
 - d. The Father

5. In terms of working out the plan of salvation, the Son and the Holy Spirit are _____ in the Godhead.
 - a. Subordinate
 - b. Superordinate
 - c. Inferior
 - d. Equal

6. From _____, it was God's plan that the Son would come to redeem His people.
 - a. The time that God's first plan failed
 - b. The fall of mankind
 - c. The moment of creation
 - d. All eternity

7. The benefit of the work of Christ is applied to us by the work and ministry of _____, who regenerates us and sanctifies us.
 - a. Christ Himself
 - b. The Holy Spirit
 - c. The Father
 - d. Christ and the Holy Spirit

8. According to R.C., when did the church truly begin?
 - a. At creation
 - b. Immediately after the fall of man
 - c. In eternity
 - d. At Pentecost

BIBLE STUDY

1. Read Ephesians 1:3–5. What does this passage of Scripture say about the temporal relationship between election and creation? When did God choose His people? Does this passage of Scripture say which person of the Godhead was pre-eminent in the work of choosing?
2. According to Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2, which person of the Godhead elects?
3. What is the common theme in each of the following Scripture passages? What do they imply about a pre-temporal “covenant of redemption”?
 - a. John 3:16
 - b. John 17:18–19
 - c. Romans 8:3
 - d. Galatians 4:4
 - e. Hebrews 2:10
4. How do John 4:34 and John 6:38–39 contribute to our understanding of the pre-temporal plan of redemption? What do the two passages of Scripture say? What do they necessarily imply?
5. Read the following passages and comment on their contribution to a fuller understanding of the eternal covenant of redemption.
 - a. Isaiah 53:12
 - b. John 17:4–5, 22, 24
 - c. Acts 2:33–36

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define the covenant of redemption as explained in this lecture. Is the scriptural evidence for such a covenant compelling? Why or why not?
2. Is there anything improper about referring to the history of redemption as the “drama of redemption”? Does the word *drama* have any connotations that make you want to replace it with another term? Explain your answer.
3. The Bible contains both explicit references and indirect allusions to covenants. Do you believe that the Bible provides internal evidence of an overall covenantal structure or is that structure something that is forced upon Scripture by theologians? Defend your answer.
4. Briefly define the roles played by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the eternal covenant of redemption. Provide Scripture passages to support your answer.

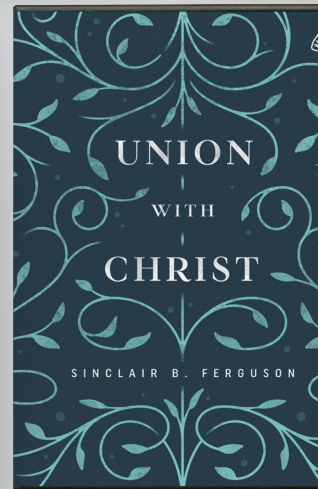
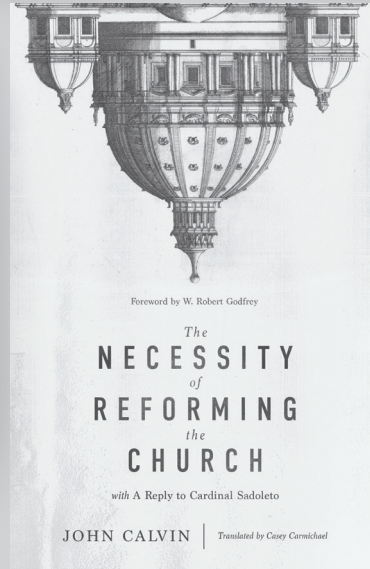
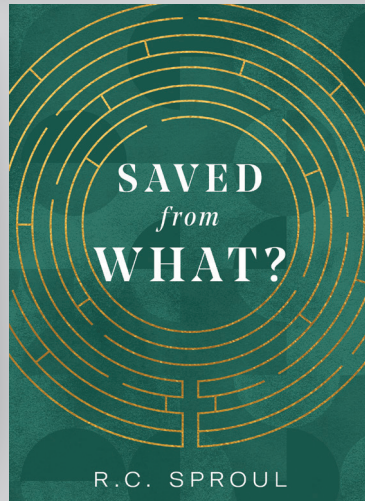
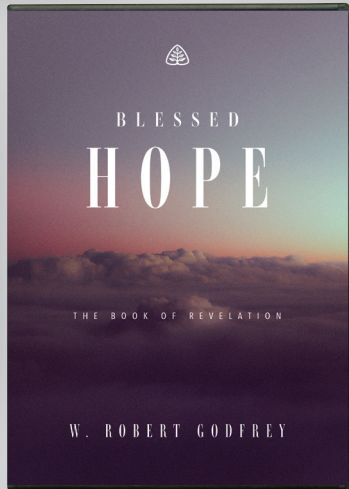
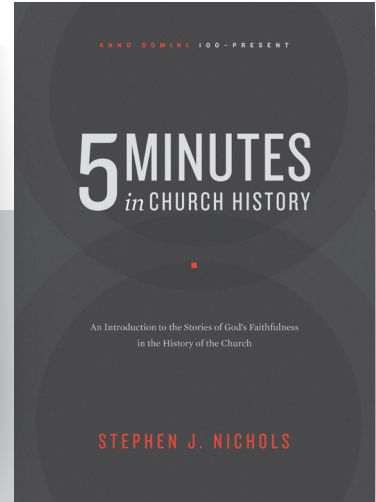
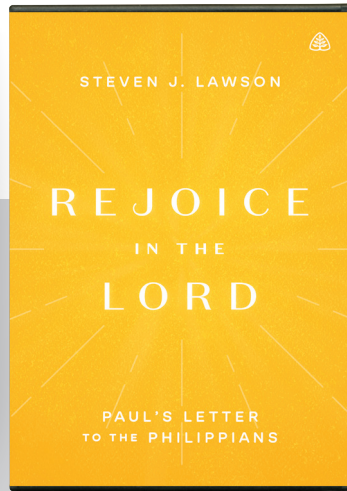
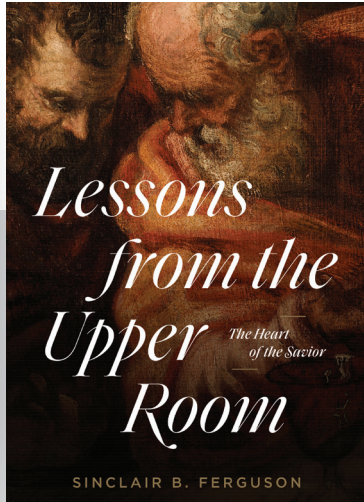
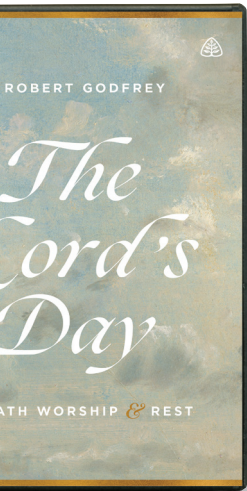
APPLICATION

1. Many times we come to Scripture reading a little bit here and a little bit there, all the while losing the overall sense of the context. As you read the Bible, begin to make a conscious effort to look for the common “dramatic” threads that tie the entire history of redemption together.
2. Have you ever believed or been taught that the work of Christ was, in some sense, an attempt to change the Father’s mind? What have you learned in this lesson that demonstrates the falsehood of that position?
3. How should we respond when we learn that from all eternity, from before the foundation of the world, God planned our salvation?
4. Read and meditate on Ephesians 1:3–14. Thank God for His amazing grace toward you.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, pp. 354–62

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