

Ferguson, *The Christian Life, a doctrinal introduction*

Andrew McCafferty, June 2008

Christianity has a very rich doctrine of salvation. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells us the story of God's covenant of salvation. In the Old Testament, God tells us how he prepared the world for a great savior. Then in the fullness of time, he came. The New Testament tells us about all that who he was and what he said and did. Christianity has a very deep and rich doctrine of salvation.

The Biblical doctrine of salvation includes a rich vision of how salvation relates to each individual believer. From eternity past, God had a plan for each of his chosen people. If you are a Christian, in eternity God already knew (認識) you and elected you. At his own appointed time, he called you and convicted you of sin. By the Holy Spirit, you were born again, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and repented of your sins. You were justified by faith, adopted as a Son of God, and united to Christ Jesus. God put an end to sin's dominion in your life. Although you continue to battle with sin, by the continued work of the Spirit and Word in your life, sin is put to death and you persevere to the end. By grace, you are destined to be victorious over death, and to enter into glory. The Bible has a very rich vision of how salvation relates to a believer.

John Calvin was the first to develop this personal side of the doctrine of salvation. The third book of Calvin's Institutes is about how God applies his salvation to us. Theodore Beza was Calvin's successor in Geneva. He continued to discuss the order or steps God uses to save us. The Puritans called this aspect of salvation "God's golden chain". Rom 8:29 tells us that God foreknew us, predestined us, called us, justified us, and glorified us. Five links in a golden chain. Many other Reformed theologians have also written about this "ordo salutis" (as it is called in Latin).

This book is a valuable contribution to this theological discussion. Some people criticize Reformed theology for being too abstract and hard to understand. To avoid this, Ferguson gives us a *biblical* discussion of God's plan of salvation. He devotes one chapter to each step in God's plan (election, calling, faith, repentance, justification, etc.) In each chapter, he discusses the most relevant biblical passages. For example, the chapter of "Called by God" discusses many of the scriptures that talk about God's calling Christians.

Another valuable feature of the book is that Ferguson explains how each doctrine should affect our Christian life. This is central to his purpose. The English title is "The Christian life, a doctrinal introduction". The book is more about the Christian life than about doctrine. Or better, it is about how Biblical truth should be at the center of our Christian life. Have you been called by God out of darkness and into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)? Then, Ferguson tells us (following Peter and Paul), let us live lives that are worthy of our calling. Have you been adopted by God as a son? Then

let us live with a new sense of God's care for us, and to seek to be a worthy son!

Ferguson writes in simple language. He avoids complex theological vocabulary. His purpose is to communicate to all Christians. For newer Christians, the book is a good introduction to the deeper aspects of salvation. For those who have been in Christ for a longer period, it is a good reminder of the wonderful grace of God in our lives.

(Tell the history of the book -- This book was first translated in and published by Sam Ling / China Horizon in simplified characters ...