
THE CONCEPTUAL ORDER OF SALVATION

A biblical guide to understanding God's work and the
response of faith

Study Edition • 2026

Customized for Ruperto Bravo Benavente (R.B.B.)

Purpose of this work

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This work begins with a simple and decisive question: How does Holy Scripture present salvation? The Bible does not give us a mechanical formula or a ladder by which human beings climb up to God. Above all, it presents God's merciful initiative, the sufficient work of Jesus Christ, and the effective application of the Holy Spirit.

The expression "conceptual order of salvation" describes logical relationships among truths that may occur together in the believer's experience. Its purpose is not to divide grace into artificial moments, but to distinguish without separating: grace is the source; Christ and His work are the foundation; the gospel is the announcement; the Spirit enlightens and regenerates; repentance and faith are the response of conversion; justification, adoption, and the Spirit's seal express the new standing; sanctification accompanies Christian life; and glorification completes the work.

The conceptual order must never become a test for judging another person's experience. Its value is pastoral: it helps us proclaim clearly, rest in Christ, and recognize that salvation belongs to the Lord from beginning to end.

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1. What “conceptual order” means

Theology often uses the Latin expression *ordo salutis* to arrange the dimensions of God’s saving work. “Order” does not mean that every aspect can always be separately dated. “Conceptual” means that we ask which truth grounds another, what proceeds from God’s initiative, and how a person responds upon hearing the gospel.

Three horizons should be distinguished. In eternity, God purposed grace in Christ. In history, Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again.

Personally, the Spirit makes the gospel announcement effective in those who believe. These horizons are related but should not be confused.

Scripture describes the same salvation as rescue, reconciliation, new birth, forgiveness, justification, adoption, sanctification, and eternal life. No single image exhausts the gift. Together they show that God does more than improve sinners: He reconciles them, grants a new standing, and begins new life within them.

2. The source: the grace of God

Grace is God's undeserved favor toward those who could not save themselves. Ephesians 2:8-9 excludes boasting: salvation is by grace through faith, not by works. Conduct is not irrelevant; works are placed correctly. They are not salvation's root but its fruit.

The human condition explains why grace comes first. Sin is not merely a collection of mistakes; it is alienation from God affecting will, affections, understanding, and conduct. Romans 3:23 declares its universality. Saving initiative therefore springs not from hidden merit in us, but from God's love revealed in Christ.

Sovereign grace does not turn people into stones. It means that even hearing with hope, turning to God, and trusting Christ depends upon God's prior action. Grace awakens, calls, convinces, and sustains; it never authorizes spiritual pride.

3. The foundation: the person and work of Christ

The center of salvation is not an inward experience but Jesus Christ. Paul summarizes gospel events: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The cross addresses guilt; the resurrection confirms victory and opens the hope of life.

Christ's death is sufficient and final. Hebrews presents a sacrifice offered once for all. Believers do not complete that work by penance, religious performance, or personal suffering. They receive through faith what Christ accomplished. Obedience that follows is gratitude, not payment.

To confess Jesus as Lord is to recognize who He is and rest in what He has done. Biblical faith does not rest its security on the intensity of an emotion, but on the faithfulness of a living Person. Our certainty does not rest on claiming that we never fail, but on recognizing that Christ never fails.

4. The announcement: the gospel

Romans 1:16 calls the gospel the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. God has chosen to save through a message that must be heard, understood, and received. Christian proclamation therefore cannot be reduced to moral advice, temporary prosperity, or psychological improvement.

The gospel includes God's holiness, the reality of sin, the identity of Jesus Christ, His substitutionary death, burial, resurrection, and the call to repent and believe. Omit the resurrection and the cross is left without victory; omit sin and the cross becomes unnecessary; omit grace and the message becomes merit.

The invitation is universal and sincere: whoever comes to Christ will never be cast out (John 6:37). The messenger speaks clearly and humbly, trusting the Holy Spirit, not human pressure, to convict of sin and display the Savior's sufficiency.

5. The call and the work of the Holy Spirit

The gospel comes outwardly through preaching, reading, or testimony. Yet saving understanding requires the Spirit's work. John 16:8-14 presents Him convicting the world and glorifying Christ. His ministry does not draw isolated attention to Himself; it illuminates the greatness of the Son.

The effective call should not be imagined as violence against the will. God opens the heart, reveals the need, and makes Christ desirable. The person truly comes, truly believes, and truly turns. Grace does not destroy human response; it makes that response possible.

Conviction may involve sorrow, fear, sudden clarity, or a quiet process. Scripture does not prescribe one emotion. What matters is faith's object and

the change of direction: abandoning every rival confidence and coming to Christ.

6. Regeneration: the new birth

Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again (John 3:3-8). Regeneration means that God communicates spiritual life where there was death. It is not mere habit reform, religious education, or a new resolution. It is the Spirit's inward work producing a new relationship with God.

Logically, the Spirit's regenerating initiative explains why a sinner can receive the gospel from the heart. Experientially, new birth, repentance, and faith are so closely joined that we should not separate them into conscious stages divided by long intervals.

The evidence of regeneration is not instant perfection. It is a new direction: hunger for the Word, sensitivity to sin, love for Christ, and the beginning of obedience. Growth may be uneven, but new life produces real signs.

7. Conversion: repentance and faith

Mark 1:15 joins the call: repent and believe the gospel. Repentance and faith can be distinguished but never separated. Repentance turns from sin and self-reliance; faith turns to Christ and rests in Him. They are not two prices paid, but two aspects of one response.

The Greek term *metanoia* points to a change of mind reaching direction and conduct. It is more than remorse. Remorse can regret consequences without coming to God; repentance acknowledges sin, agrees with God's judgment, and seeks His mercy.

Faith, *pistis*, includes knowledge, assent, and trust. Knowing facts about Christ is not enough, and faith is not contentless optimism. To believe is to receive God's testimony concerning His Son and entrust oneself to Him as the only Savior. Later works demonstrate faith's reality, but never replace Christ as the foundation.

Central truth: Repentance and faith are inseparable aspects of

conversion.

8. Union with Christ

Many blessings of salvation are best understood through union with Christ. The believer is identified with Him in His death and resurrection, receives life in Him, and belongs to His body. This union is not a loss of personality or a mixing of essence; it is spiritual communion and representation.

In Christ condemnation is gone (Romans 8:1); in Christ the believer is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); in Christ every spiritual blessing is received (Ephesians 1:3). “In Christ” keeps us from treating blessings as detached objects: all are received in relationship with the Savior.

The same truth joins security and transformation. The Christ who justifies also shares His life. Free salvation is therefore not sterile. Those united to Christ are called to walk consistently with the identity they have received.

9. Justification: declared righteous through faith

Justification is God’s act of declaring the believing sinner righteous on the basis of Christ’s work. Romans 5:1 connects justification through faith with peace with God. It first describes a favorable verdict before God’s court, not a process of moral improvement.

Faith does not earn justification. It is the empty hand receiving Christ. Righteousness does not come from a balance of personal virtues, but from the Savior’s obedience and sacrifice. God’s justice and the freeness of forgiveness are both preserved.

Justification changes the believer’s standing from condemned to accepted. Sanctification progressively changes conduct. Confusing them produces two errors: trying to become perfect in order to be accepted, or assuming acceptance makes holiness unnecessary. The gospel avoids both.

Central truth: Faith receives Christ; it is not merit that purchases

justification.

10. Reconciliation, redemption, and forgiveness

Reconciliation describes the end of hostility and the restoration of peace with God through Christ (Romans 5:10-11). Redemption speaks of liberation at a price: Christ's blood. Forgiveness says the debt of sin is canceled. These are complementary dimensions of the same work.

The words answer different needs. We are guilty and need forgiveness; enslaved and need redemption; enemies and need reconciliation. Christ fully answers each need.

Believers may approach God without denying sin's seriousness or remaining chained to guilt already addressed at the cross. Daily confession restores fellowship and expresses honesty, but it does not repeat Christ's sacrifice or rebuild the filial relationship from the ground up.

11. Adoption and a new identity

Salvation does not end with acquittal. God receives the believer as a child. Romans 8:15-17 speaks of the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry, "Abba, Father." Adoption grants access, belonging, loving discipline, inheritance, and hope.

This identity rests not on manufactured self-esteem but on God's promise. A child may be corrected without being treated as an enemy. The believer approaches in prayer not because performance is flawless, but because acceptance has been granted in Christ.

Adoption also creates a family. The Church is Christ's living body through the ages. Personal faith was never designed for isolation: believers learn to love, serve, forgive, and bear burdens in community.

12. The seal and indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 1:13-14 teaches that after hearing the word of truth and believing, believers were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. The seal indicates ownership, authenticity, and security; the Spirit is the guarantee of the inheritance until final redemption.

The Spirit's indwelling is not a prize for a spiritual elite. It belongs to every believer in Christ. His presence comforts, illuminates the Word, distributes gifts, strengthens prayer, and develops holy fruit.

Christian security does not promote carelessness. Because we belong to God, we are exhorted not to grieve the Spirit and to walk worthy of our calling. The seal does not glorify the believer; it guarantees that God will carry His redemptive purpose forward.

Central truth: The Spirit seals the believer as God's possession and the guarantee of the inheritance.

13. Sanctification: growing from acceptance

Sanctification has a definitive aspect: the believer has been set apart for God. It also has a progressive aspect: learning obedience, renewing the mind, and putting sin to death. Philippians 2:12-13 keeps responsibility and grace together: believers work because God works in them.

Ordinary means of growth include Scripture, prayer, the fellowship of the Church, the Lord's Supper, service, and the Father's discipline. None purchases acceptance; all are paths through which the Spirit conforms believers to Christ.

Progress is not always linear. There are struggles, falls, and restoration. The biblical response is neither to excuse sin nor despair, but to confess, come to the Advocate, and continue. Discipline confirms the Father's love and leads toward peaceful fruit.

14. Perseverance, security, and assurance

God preserves His people and calls them to persevere. These truths do not compete. Biblical warnings are real means that awaken believers to abide in Christ; promises sustain hope when they face their weakness.

The objective basis of security is Christ's work, God's promise, and the Spirit's seal. Subjective assurance grows through the Word's testimony, the Spirit's inward work, and the fruit of living faith. Not every believer enjoys the same degree of assurance at every moment.

When conscience accuses, ask first: In whom am I trusting? The gaze must return to the Savior. Then examine life honestly, confess what is needed, and seek pastoral help. Healthy assurance produces humility, gratitude, and obedience.

Central truth: Security rests objectively on Christ, God's promise, and the Spirit's seal.

15. Glorification: the completion

Salvation looks toward a glorious end. Romans 8:30 presents glorification with the certainty of God's purpose. When Christ appears, believers will be transformed and forever be with the Lord. Redemption will reach the body and every trace of sin will be removed.

This hope does not escape the present. It comforts in grief, strengthens under persecution, and relativizes idols of success. The Church waits watchfully for her Lord without setting dates the Father has not revealed.

Glorification will show that salvation was entirely grace and that this grace produced a renewed humanity. Final praise will not celebrate redeemed self-sufficiency, but the Lamb who purchased a people for God.

16. Summary of the conceptual order

The movement may be summarized this way: the purpose of grace begins in God; saving work is accomplished historically in Christ; the gospel announces that work; the Spirit calls, enlightens, and gives life; the person turns to God in repentance and faith; united with Christ, the believer receives justification, forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, and the Spirit's seal; lives in sanctification and perseverance; and will finally be glorified.

Not all these expressions identify separate “steps.” Some describe cause, some the means, some the response, some the new standing, and others development and completion. Distinction protects clarity; unity protects the gospel.

The decisive pastoral question is not whether someone can repeat every term, but whether that person has heard the gospel and rests in Jesus Christ. Doctrine serves faith when it leads to the Savior, strengthens worship, and forms a life of love.

17. Errors to avoid

First error: turning the order into a rigid formula. God deals with real people; circumstances, emotions, and times of understanding vary. Second: making repentance a meritorious work or demanding a uniform emotional intensity. Third: reducing faith to words spoken without understanding the gospel.

Fourth: separating Christ from His benefits and seeking security in a date, decision, or isolated experience. Fifth: confusing justification and sanctification, then living under endless evaluation of personal performance. Sixth: using grace as an excuse to persist deliberately in sin.

Seventh: claiming more than Scripture claims about exact sequence. Where faithful believers use different vocabulary, we should listen, define terms, and maintain the center: God's grace in Jesus Christ, received through faith, produces new life.

18. Pastoral guidance and final appeal

To the person who does not yet believe: do not wait until you feel worthy. Admit your need, hear the good news, and come to Christ. He is sufficient. Repent and believe the gospel. Do not rest your hope on inherited religion, works, emotions, or personal promises.

To the troubled believer: return to God's objective promises. Faith may be weak and still rest on a strong Savior. Confess known sin, receive biblical care, and look again to Christ.

To the Church: proclaim the whole gospel, make disciples patiently, and never substitute manipulation for the Spirit's work. Salvation begins in grace, rests on Christ, is received through faith, and ends in glory. Therefore, all honor belongs to God.

Questions for study and reflection

1. In what sense is grace the source of the whole order of salvation?
2. Why must Christ's historical work remain central?
3. How are repentance and faith distinguished and united?
4. What is the difference between justification and sanctification?
5. What does adoption add to the believer's identity?
6. What does it mean to be sealed with the Holy Spirit?
7. Where should the foundation of assurance be sought?
8. How does the hope of glorification transform life today?

Prayer for reflection

Lord God, I acknowledge that salvation comes from Your grace. Thank You for Jesus Christ, for His death and resurrection. Turn my trust away from every personal merit and lead me to rest in Him. Enlighten my understanding by Your Spirit, produce sincere repentance, strengthen my faith, and form in me a life that honors You. Keep Your Church in the truth and lead it to the day of redemption. Amen.

TEACHING MAP: THE CONCEPTUAL ORDER OF SALVATION

1 GRACE

God takes the initiative

Eph 2:8-9

2 CHRIST

He dies and rises again

1 Cor 15:3-4

3 GOSPEL

The work is proclaimed

Rom 1:16

4 THE SPIRIT

Calls, enlightens, gives life

John 3:5-8

5 CONVERSION

Repentance and faith

Mark 1:15

6 UNION WITH CHRIST

A new standing and life

2 Cor 5:17

7 BENEFITS

Justification, adoption, seal

Rom 5:1; Eph 1:13

8 THE WALK

Sanctification and perseverance

Phil 2:12-13

9 THE GOAL

Glorification with Christ

Rom 8:30

Salvation is by grace, grounded in Christ, received through faith, and completed in glory.

Biblical and bibliographic references

- Holy Bible. Scripture references are translated for explanatory purposes; readers may consult a standard American English Bible alongside the Spanish Reina-Valera 1960.
- Lacueva, Francisco. Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español. Editorial CLIE.
- Principal passages: Mark 1:15; John 3:3-8; 6:37; 16:8-14; Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-26; 5:1-11; 8:1, 15-17, 29-30; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:1-10; Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 7:25; 9:12; 10:10-14; 1 John 1:9; 5:11-13.

Compiler's biographical note



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