

That we are far from God is almost self-evident but if there is any doubt the concepts of Scripture will make it firm. That liberals, et al, today speak of God in terms of familiarity is not surprising in that they do not really understand whom He is. That men speak of making their own lives eternally significant is not surprising in that they know not either their limitations or their ability. We are not smug about this but are thankful that in the coming of Jesus our need was made known (John 16) and in the work of Jesus our need is met.

b. A general understanding

It follows, then, that we are often able to have a general understanding of soteriology without the benefit of a more comprehensive grip on the subject. We know where we are and what God has done to bring us to a given point but are not articulate on the steps in the background. As we might say it evangelistically...one knows one is saved but is really not sure of the how and why.

Early Christians, you will discover, were delighted with the spiritual reality of deliverance and freedom. Much like young believers today, the sophistication of progress had not diminished their appreciation or zeal. But as one matures it is necessary to discern more of the structure underlying that maturity so that growth may be continuous.

c. Particulars

Many of the particulars in soteriology have been the cause of church division and strife. In our discussion we will not try to establish correctness or prove the exact nature of error. Our aim is to see how the understanding of the doctrine developed to the point where our standards describe it today.

B. Early Concepts of Soteriology

As the church accepted at face value the fact of Christ's death in behalf of sinners, the earlier expressions of Christianity do not present much in the formal study of the subject. Believing it was the big item...not explaining the matter. The atonement was spoken of in warm and personal terms and the ideas that would later be initiated to deal with it more particularly are not seen in the early church--or are not clearly identified. We are able to offer, therefore, some simple summaries on subjective christology from this time.

1. Regarding Christ's death and the results for the believer.

Before Tertullian (200 AD) little is said as to its form or basis for satisfaction or justification. It is spoken of largely as a way to new life and repentance of old.