

# Paul's Concept of Salvation Theology and Its Relevance

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**Abstract** - Salvation is available to all through the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). The gospel contains God's saving act through the work of the Son of God who died, was crucified, buried, and rose again. For everyone who believes or believes in Jesus Christ the Son of God, it will obtain salvation through God's act of justification. This research provides a new understanding of the world of theology in general because it has broken the concepts of particular salvation, which are claimed by certain religions, specifically Judaism. The apostle Paul's view of salvation that can be obtained by all people without any distinction of ethnicity, culture, and religion has opened a new view of the way of salvation. Although the concept of salvation applies universally the people who are saved are only those who have been appointed to believe in Christ Jesus. The essence of the apostle Paul's teaching about salvation lies in the work of Jesus Christ, and the act of Salvation is done by none other than God Himself. Although the meaning of salvation for Paul has an inclusive element (for all who believe), the concept of salvation that he describes in Romans is exclusive. Because Paul uses his Jewish background and relates it to his understanding of God's saving act through the work of Jesus Christ. The term justification that Paul uses to describe salvation has a meaning if God as the Supreme Judge has saved people in the present and as a guarantee of salvation in the future.

**Keywords:** Concept, paul, relevance, salvation, theology.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The limitations of human existence as created beings cause him to always be in worry when facing the threat of danger, disease, and the mystery of death. This existential anxiety drives people to always crave safety in their lives. That is why salvation is a central teaching in every religious belief and even philosophy of human life. In other words, safety is the greatest human need, whether we realize it or not. In the use of the definition, the breadth of understanding of safety shapes the perception and use of the term safety to be different in human life. Sproul in (Tanudjaja, 2016). Safety is often associated with things like getting out of a threatening situation, recovering from illness, or even a boxer being "rescued" by the bell. In such use, the understanding of salvation is ultimately devoid of clarity. In contrast to this general view, salvation in the biblical context provides a definition that is related not only to phenomena but also to God's work, human existential conditions involving anthropology and hamartiology, so that the idea of salvation in Christian theology has a deep meaning.

As will be explained, Paul's theology of salvation is closely related to his intellectual experiences in the context of anthropology, the Law, and his spiritual journey when he came into contact with the early church. His theology radically describes God's immense grace for sinners, and one of the sinners who does not deserve to be called an apostle is himself (1 Cor. 15:9).

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative, to provide a practical overview of the concept of salvation according to Paul and its relevance. The researcher conducts an analysis using the literature review method from related books or journals to collect information relevant to the topic or problem that is the subject of research.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## A. Definition and Understanding

### Definition of Theology

Theology came from greek(θεος, theos), Lord", and, logia, "words," "speech," or "discourse", or sometimes called the science of religion based on reasoning about religion,spiritualityandLord. Fundamentally, theology can be defined as a scientific discipline that studies everything related to religious beliefs. Theology enables one to better understand tradition own the religion or other religious traditions. Theology is also a scientific discipline that functions to make comparisons between various traditions, preserve, renew a certain religious tradition, help spread a religious tradition, apply the sources of a particular religious tradition in a situation or need for the present and also the future. If it is associated with the concept of salvation, the theology of salvation can be interpreted as a concept or teaching of God about the salvation provided by God for humans through the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Definition of Safety

The teaching of salvation affects the way of faith, the way of life, and the way of serving God (evangelism). If the understanding of salvation is not properly understood, it will cause the preaching of the gospel to turn into false/false preaching. Thus, it is necessary to have a clear vision of safety and start from its definition. Both in the Septuagint and the New Testament, the Greek verb sozo and the words of the same origin, soter and soteria are generally translated from the Hebrew word yasha and several related nouns. But in its use in several places, the word sozo is translated as shalom, peace, or wholeness. Based on this idea, salvation can mean care, healing, help, rescue, redemption, or welfare (cf. Matt. 9:22; Acts 27:20, 31-34; Heb. 5:7). But in its use in the context of Christian theology, it specifically means salvation from eternal death and the gift of eternal life to a person (Rom. 5:9; Heb. 7:25).(Ryrie, 1991) as described by Sproul (Tanudjaja, 2016), The Bible uses the term salvation in a special sense to refer to our redemption from the consequences of sin and reconciliation with God. In this sense, salvation means being saved from the most fatal calamity, namely God's judgment. The ultimate or most important salvation has been accomplished by Christ, "who saves us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Thus, salvation in biblical terms includes both physical and spiritual components (physical salvation/wholeness—shalom, as well as salvation for eternal life in Christ). However, in a theoretical context, salvation specifically refers to God's act of saving sinful humans from death and bestowing eternal life in Christ Jesus.

### Paul's Life

Acts 22, gives information about Paul's background. Paul was a devout Jew. He was born in Tarsus, raised in Jerusalem, and educated by Gamaliel (verse 3). "Born, brought up, educated" is a common biographical formula in Greek writings. The significance of it is that when Paul calls himself "raised up" in Jerusalem. The most natural meaning is that he was raised from childhood in Jerusalem, not in Tarsus. This relates to the later reference that his nephew was in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16).(Rimun, 2019). Tarsus was a large and prosperous commercial city situated on the Cydnus River in its time, about ten miles from the Mediterranean Sea at the foot of the Taurus Mountains on the southeastern coast of Asia Minor. Tarsus is located seventy-nine meters above sea level on the fertile eastern plains of Cilicia. Tarsus became the regional capital under the Roman empire.(Achtemeier, 1985).

In Galatians 1:14, Paul says: "And in Judaism, I was far ahead of many of my contemporaries among my people, as one who was very diligent in keeping the customs of my fathers." In this verse, Paul identifies himself as an intelligent and educated person far beyond his peers.

To clarify the chronology of Paul's life, the author provides a brief description of Paul's life journey in the form of the table below.

AD date	Incident
3 (?)	Paul's Birth
18-30	Training in Jerusalem
33/34	Repentance
34-36	In Arabic

46	In Jerusalem
46-48	First mission trip: Asia Minor
48-49	Jerusalem Congregation
49-52	Second mission trip: Asia Minor and Europe
53-57	The mission trip when: Asia and Europe
58-60	Imprisonment in Caesarea
60-61	Trip to Rome
61-63	Imprisonment in Rome
63-66	Service all the way to Spain
66-67	Imprisonment in Rome and execution

**B. The Apostle Paul's Concept of Salvation**

The doctrine of salvation is crucial teaching in Christian theology. Specifically, in Paul's theology, the emphasis on the saving gospel message became an important point in his preaching which at the same time transformed his life, understanding, ministry, and mission as Paul emphasized in Romans 1:16. The transformation of Paul's life which was carried out by the Holy Spirit was presented gradually at certain moments in Paul's life such as the example of the believers he persecuted, his personal struggles with the Law, and his spiritual experiences.(Barclay, Ambassador for Christ, 2016). After his conversion, Paul was no longer a guest for the Apostles in Jerusalem but he was directly involved in the mission of evangelizing from Jerusalem (Acts 9:28), Damascus (Acts 9:27) to other nations.(Schnabel, 2010)

It is undeniable that after Paul's conversion, the development of Christianity to the outside world greatly increased. Barclay illustrates this with a rhetorical question and answer, "How did Christianity manage to spread from that tiny Palestinian state, across the European continent to Rome, the world's capital? Paul himself."(Barclay, Ambassador for Christ, 2016) Paul's missionary journey is even estimated to be up to about 10,000 km. An evangelistic missionary journey that is passed on foot. Barclay says, "If we remember that Paul traveled 10,000 km for Christ, we can confirm that Paul was a scout, an adventurer, and a true pioneer."(Barclay, Ambassador for Christ, 1985) The gift of salvation that changed Paul had prompted him to open the way for the Gentiles to see salvation through the light of the gospel message (Acts. 9:15; 13:2; Rom. 11:13 am; 15:16; Gal. 1:16; 2:2).

The transformation of Paul's life correlated with his belief in the saving truth of the gospel. In other words, a proper understanding of the gift of salvation had an impact on Paul's life which was continually renewed and prepared (1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 4:16), maximally in ministry and evangelism (1 Cor. 15:10). , so that he completes his ministry well (2 Tim. 4:7). The firm belief in the salvation revealed by the gospel became Paul's hope in all circumstances and continued to be encouraged to bear fruit for Christ throughout his life (Phil. 1:21-22).

**Paul's Epistles**

As an apostle of Christ, Paul was not only productive in evangelism and church planting, but he was also productive in writing and sending pastoral letters. Half (as many as 13 books) of the total number of books of the New Testament were written by Paul. The following is a summary of Paul's letters, their chronology, and the central themes raised in these letters.(Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology, 2010).

Characteristic	Name	AD date	Origin	Theology
GENERAL	Galatians	48	Antioch/Syria	Soteriology and Eschatology
	1 Thessalonians	50	Corinth	
	2 Thealonia	50	Corinth	
	1 Corinthians	55	Ephesus	
	2 Corinthians	55	Macedonian	
	Rome	57	Corinth	
PROPHETIC	Ephesus	62	Rome	

	Philippines Colossians Philemon	63 62 62	Rome Rome Rome	Christology
<b>Pastoral</b>	1 Timothy Titus 2 Timothy	63 63 67	Macedonian Corinth Rome	Ecclesiology

### Paul's Theology of Salvation

Paul's claim of salvation in the Gospels in the context of the first century drew attention to both Greco-Roman and Jewish communities. For the Greco-Roman society, the message of salvation could be the answer to the mystery and the fate of man in the face of death. Salvation is also identified by them in the context of romanticism—the hope of a return to the former Greco-Roman glory. Meanwhile, for the Jews, salvation is a model of liberation from colonialism which is eschatologically messianic but still refers to the heyday of the reign of the Davidic dynasty. In this tension, Paul presents the concept of the gospel which emphasizes liberation through the work of the cross of Christ which is present (context of that time/present) and in the future. (Pate, 2004)

In explaining the idea of salvation, Paul uses a variety of approaches and technical terms according to the context of the times in which he preaches the gospel. This is to make the teaching of salvation in Paul's mind clear to his listeners. Specifically, regarding the terms and concepts of salvation in Paul's theology, C. Marvin Pate explains Paul's thinking. The Greek word for salvation is *soteria* and to save is *sozo*. For Paul, the term refers primarily to God's saving activity. However, the use of this term was extended to include such meanings as divine deliverance from sin, the flesh and the Law. (Pate, 2004).

Paul uses the term salvation with an expanded meaning but in a structured way while maintaining his God-centered idea as the central initiator of salvation. This feature will continue to appear in Paul's study of salvation theology in his letters. However, idea of Paul's concept of salvation is also inseparable from his anthropological concept which specifically departs from the belief that "humans are enslaved by sin and unable to free themselves from its dominion." (Zuck, 2011).

### Grace-Centered Salvation (Charis-centrism)

As mentioned above, the idea of salvation in Paul's concept of thought emphasizes God's grace. God took the initiative in saving humans based on His grace solely through the work of Christ. (Pate, 2004) Salvation starts from God's action in Christ to the existence of the lives of God's people personally and in their relationship with the church. It is important to grasp that for Paul, behind the whole salvation process always lay the initiative of God. No other word expresses his theology so clearly on this point as "grace" (*charis*). For it summed up not only the epochal event of Christ itself ("the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ") but also the grace which made the vital breakthrough in individual human experience (the grace "received," "given," "accepted"). And it defined not only the past act of God initiating into a life of faith, but also the present continuing experience of divine enabling ("this grace in which we stand," "under grace," grace sufficient), as well as particular enabling and commissions ("grace and apostleship," "charisms which differ in accordance with the grace given to us"). In short, *charis* joins *agape* ("love") at the very center of Paul's gospel. More than any other, these two words, "grace" and "love," together sum up and most clearly characterize his whole theology. (Dunn, 1998)

Paul's understanding of salvation was closely related to the grace of God in Christ (Rom. 3:24; 5:2; Eph. 1:2, 7; 2:7). Grace not only liberates and saves but also enables, guides, and provides special means (spiritual gifts) for believers to be able to struggle in life and build up the body of Christ while on earth. Paul's concept of salvation in his writings as a whole refers to two important things, namely God's grace and love for sinners. God's grace and mercy are the basis on which Paul urges the congregation to surrender themselves wholeheartedly to God and the fulfillment of His will. (Zuck, 2011).

### Technical Terms in Paul's Theology of Salvation

Christ's redemptive work satisfies God's justice and frees man from the bonds of sin and proclaims legal justification for believers. In his presentation, Paul uses four key terms related to the doctrine of salvation, namely: Forgiveness, Atonement, Atonement, and Justification. (Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology,

2010)

**Forgiveness.** The forgiveness that God does for believers, He does according to His grace (Col. 2:13). The word forgave (Gr. Charizomai) means "to give out of grace, to give generously, to forgive out of grace." Another word that is similar to the word "forgiveness" is aphesis which means "to set free" or "to send away." In usage, theologically this word means "to forgive" or "to cancel a bond/punishment" (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). This word relates to the cancellation of debts. Through Christ's atoning work, the believer's debt has been nailed to the cross. Second, aphemi means to release or set free (Ephesians 1:7). (Setiawan, 2018). With a strong emphasis on these two words, Paul wants to convey the message that the subject of forgiveness is related to God's grace alone and there is no human action involved in it.

**Redemption.** The word "redemption" (Gr. Apolutrosis) is used ten times in the New Testament, seven of which are used in Paul's writings. Redemption means release by way of payment at a certain price or the process of achieving release by paying a ransom. (Guthrie, 2006). This idea relates to the Roman cultural background where a slave was sold and then bought at a price that was supposed to free the slave. This term is used by Paul to show the correlation between the deliverance of believers from slavery to sin and the price Christ paid through His blood. His death was necessary for the liberation and justification of believers from sin (Rom 3:24). The redemption has been done, then man can be declared righteous (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14).

Two words that are similar to apolutrosis are agorazo and exagorazo. The basic meaning of the word agorazo is "often to visit the council." The meaning of this word then develops into "buy or get in deliberation." The New Testament uses this word twenty-four times in the sense of "to buy" (eg Matt. 13:44; Luke 9:13). While the Septuagint uses this word with the same meaning of buying, an ordinary commercial transaction (eg Gen. 41:57; 42:5, 7). In usage related to salvation, in the New Testament this word has three meanings, namely: 1). Through Christ's atoning work, He has paid the ransom price for all mankind (2 Pet. 2:1). 2). The price of the ransom is clearly stated, namely the blood of Christ (Rev. 5:9-10). 3). Since we were bought at this ransom price we must serve Him 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 7:22-23. (Ryrie, 1991).

While the word exagorazo is a combination that adds the prefix ex to the word agorazo so that it means, "to buy out of the place of deliberation." Paul uses this word with a very important meaning regarding Christ's atonement. In Galatians 3:13 the idea of Christ's substitution is very clear about the redemption that we used to live under a curse and Christ bore that curse. Then in Galatians 4:5 Paul states that believers have been delivered from the demands of the Law.

**Atonement.** In the New Testament, the word "atonement" (Gr. Hilasterion) occurs four times (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). This word refers to the hood that covered the ark of the Covenant (a rectangular box containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments. cf. Exod. 25:10-16) which was a symbol of God's presence and the centerpiece of the celebration of the Day of Atonement. (Zuck, 2011). While the meaning of this word is to divert, move, or reconcile. Romans 3:26 explains that through Christ's death, God remains just (His integrity is maintained) and at the same time He can still declare that believers in Christ have been justified (His love is revealed). Guthrie explains, "There is more information about God's wrath in Romans than in any other book in the New Testament. This means that Christ's atoning work is absolutely essential. No one can face that wrath unless God Himself intervenes. (Guthrie, 2006). By nature, sinful humans are enemies of God (Isa. 59:1-2; Col. 1:21, 22; Jas. 4:4). However, through Christ's death, the enmity and wrath of God were lifted (Rom. 5:10). Everyone who believes in Christ will be reconciled to God. (Setiawan, 2018). Christ's death was sufficient to provide atonement for sin so that both God's holiness and His justice were fully satisfied.

**Justification.** The term justification is one of the terms specifically used in Paul's theology of salvation. The basic meaning of justification is "to declare true." The verb dikaioo (justify) is used Paul in a legal sense. In other words, the term has to do with deliverance from the just punishment of sin. (Guthrie, 2006). Justification is God's legal act in which God declares that believing sinners are justified by virtue of the blood of Christ. Paul uses this term to refer to such things as: Justification is a gift from God (Rom. 3:24); Justification occurs through faith (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 3:4); Justification is possible through the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9); Justification is separate from the Law (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:110). The emphasis on justification gives clarity to the concept of justification in Paul's thinking that humans are not justified through keeping the Law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. God does not declare a sinner to be righteous but makes the sinner righteous (Hetmina, 2021).

### **Paul's Four Models of Salvation Theology Approach.**

In an effort to interpret Paul's paradoxical theology of salvation (present/future—that has been/not yet), there are four models of interpretive approaches by scholars to Paul's idea of salvation, namely: 1). Justification and/or sanctification. this idea is commonly found in the concept of reformed churches which emphasizes justification and sanctification. Justification refers to the event of faith in Christ's death and resurrection that precedes sanctification—the process of living a godly life. Calvinists distinguish the two terms, while Armenians tend to combine the two. 2). The indicative and imperative “mode” of safety. The essence of this view is that Christians should be (imperative mode, unsaved) what they are supposed to be (indicative mode, already saved).

Covenant law—covenantal nomism. Sanders' emphasis on Paul's theology of salvation refers to the adoption of the concept of the People of God (Israel) entering into the covenant by grace through faith, while good works are a condition of remaining in it. 4). The overlap of the two epochs. The fourth view is a paradoxical idea of salvation that has been accepted in the past but is still in process today and will be perfected in the future. (Pate, 2004).

### **Three Dimensions of Time Paul's Concept of Salvation in Romans 6:1-14.**

An important emphasis in Paul's theology of salvation is on the three-dimensional approach of time to salvation theology in Romans 6:1-14. This idea is also found in other letters of Paul both explicitly and implicitly. The three-time dimensions of the safety concept are: 1). The juridical past. In verses 2-4a, 5a, 6a, 8a it is emphasized that believers have died and rose together with Christ through the event of baptism which refers to aspects of the past as well as juridical. 2) The present is moral. The present which relates to the moral aspect is found in verses such as 4b, 6b, 11, 12-14. In these verses, Paul emphasizes the aspect of the moral responsibility of believers today. Today's emphasis places a moral responsibility on all believers in their lives to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). 3). The future is eschatological. However, in verses such as 5b and 8b, there is information that the salvation received is still awaiting completion at the coming of Christ in the last days. This idea is explained as the paradox of salvation in Paul's theology. Fee (Pate, 2004) explains the idea of Paul's paradox of salvation in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit as follows:

Being saved has to do with faith in Christ, which also includes faithfulness to Christ. One's whole life involves surrendering (believing) to Christ, who by the Holy Spirit continually transforms us into the likeness of God. One enters (unites) so that one can dwell in, and for Paul, salvation includes the whole process, not just the starting point. (Fees, 2004).

If it is related to Pate's view, it can be seen that the aspect of morality which Fee complements with the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, clarifies the emphasis on Paul's paradoxical concept of salvation—already legal (juridical), but continues to process (morality in the renewal of the Holy Spirit) until it is perfected. at the second coming of Christ (eschatological).

### **Reflections on Paul's Theology of Salvation and Its Relevance**

This belief in salvation in Christ provided a solid foundation for Paul's preaching of the gospel. The emphasis on a strong applicative form between the understanding of salvation and its practice causes Paul's theological discourse to be not abstract theology, his ideas are so unified and manifested in his personal life. Gorman provides an interesting explanation of Paul's theological style and his spirituality as a reflection of the integration of Paul's theology and its relevance for today, For some people, a theologian is someone who writes learned, theoretical tomes and is out of touch with the daily life of real people (and perhaps even with God). Paul was certainly not a theologian in that sense; he was an evangelist, a pastor, a spiritual director, a community builder, a person deeply in communion with God. Thus we have looked first at his gospel and his spirituality before considering his theology, or his 'thoughts' about God. Paul did, however, operate with a set of clear convictions, and he was much more consistent (though always creatively so) in the articulation and application of these convictions than he is often given credit for. His task was to set forth, as clearly and persuasively as possible, the significance of these convictions for himself and his communities. That is precisely what a theologian's true task always has been, ... Paul was indeed a theologian in this sense; we might today call him a 'pastoral theologian. (Gorman, 2004).

Paul's concept of salvation in Christ is not only a "theology" that is imprinted on the cognitive but is a truth that transforms his life so as to produce a model of Christian life that is integrated in real thought and action. A

fruitful life for the Kingdom of God by bringing the gospel message to unbelievers. Paul's approach to salvation theology needs to be a reflection and correction for theologians and congregations who are often trapped in dualism—theory and practice. Theologians generally only refer to complex theological formulations but often neglect their application. While the congregation generally only refers to practical matters and avoids theological ideas, it also neglects the primary teachings of the faith. Paul set an example by integrating these two camps in a consistent form of application.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Paul's approach to salvation theology is integrated in two dimensions, namely vertical (God's grace through faith in Christ) and horizontal (moral responsibility of God's people). This idea is what makes Paul's theology of salvation so unique and emphasizes the idea of the gospel and the grace of God in Christ. Another important point of Paul's idea of salvation is the emphasis on the three dimensions of salvation—past, present and future. This form of paradox presents a belief in salvation, moral responsibility as well as a solid hope in Christ. From this idea, the impact of salvation was then applied in Paul's life. Belief in the salvation of the gospel of Christ transformed his life, ministry and mission.

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