



# Soteriology

## Views of Soteriology

**Lesson Overview:** History of Soteriological Views and Arminian and Calvinistic Views of Soteriology.

### Introduction:

The history of soteriology reveals a rich and complex development of thought on the doctrine of salvation. From the Early Church through the Reformation and beyond, various perspectives have emerged that continue to shape theological discussion today.

## I. A History of Soteriological Views

### A. The \_\_\_\_\_ Era

1. The Patristic Era of Church history is very influential on us today. It vastly affected the doctrine of salvation.
2. The word patristic is from the Greek *patēr*, which means father or forefather.<sup>1</sup> This term pertains to the first few centuries of the Church after the writing of the New Testament or to the early Church fathers or writers of that period (generally A.D. 100-750).<sup>2</sup>
3. "In the first centuries after the apostolic period, the Church was preoccupied with the Christological controversies. Therefore, the early fathers recognized that the debates about the nature of Christ were also disputes about the nature of salvation."<sup>3</sup>
  - Early on, the main controversies in the Church as a whole were those that involved the deity of Christ, and therefore, the foundation of the gospel was at risk.
4. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria wrote in his work *On the Incarnation*, defending the deity of Christ. "Athanasius pointed out that if Jesus Christ is not divine, then his death provides only an example of how the creature is supposed to obey the Creator, which means salvation is by works. But since the Savior is God incarnate, then his atoning death was the act of God satisfying himself; therefore, salvation is by grace alone. In defending the deity of Christ, the early fathers such as Athanasius were particularly concerned to preserve the gracious nature of salvation."<sup>4</sup>
5. There wasn't an ecumenical council that disputed salvation till the fifth century. This caused a lack of clarity on the truths of salvation. The Western Church began to understand the doctrine of justification in terms of merit rather than grace.



<sup>1</sup> Dougald McLaurin III, "Ancestry and Posterity," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Keathley, "The Work of God: Salvation," in *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014), 551.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

6. "Early Latin writers such as Tertullian began to teach that man can earn merit so as to make God his debtor and can satisfy his obligations to God through deeds of penance."<sup>5</sup>
7. This shift began the rise of sacramentalism, which is the belief that one receives grace by partaking of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>6</sup>
8. As bad as these things may be, the most serious issue that arose during the Patristic Era was the teaching of Pelagianism. Pelagius's concern was about the lax moral condition of the Church, and he considered Augustine's writings on grace to be a major contributor to the problem. His teachings can be summed up into three points.
  - a. If God expects moral perfection from humans, then it must be possible to live above sin.
  - b. Humans have the natural ability both to choose righteousness and to live righteously.
  - c. The impact of Adam's fall upon his offspring is simply one of providing a bad example.<sup>7</sup>
9. In his work, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, Augustine responded to the Pelagian challenge by defending the truth of original sin. That is because of Adam's sin; all mankind was now under sin. That rendered man incapable of saving himself and in desperate need of salvation by grace.
  - a. "Building on the doctrine of total depravity, Augustine reasoned that salvation is possible by grace alone with God acting as the sole agent. Even the repentance and faith necessary for receiving salvation are gifts from God. Why, then, did God not give saving faith to all? Augustine answered that God has predestined only a certain number to eternal life for reasons known only to him."<sup>8</sup>
  - b. "The councils of Carthage (AD 418) and Orange (AD 529) affirmed the Augustinian view and rejected Pelagianism."<sup>9</sup>
  - c. "Though Augustine understood salvation to be by grace, he did not believe faith is the only condition for receiving redemption. Rather, he viewed love as the primary requirement. In addition, he accepted the Latin interpretation of justification to mean "to make righteous" and taught the sacramental view of receiving grace. Combining these together ironically resulted in opening the door to semi-Pelagianism (the belief that God and man cooperate in salvation) in the medieval Church."<sup>10</sup>

## B. The \_\_\_\_\_ Era

1. The Medieval Era, which is also known as the Middle Ages, is a period of history from AD 500 to 1500.<sup>11</sup>
2. "During the medieval era, Catholic theology solidified the view that the Church is the storehouse of the saving merit of Christ and that one receives salvation by obediently receiving the sacraments of the Church."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Keathley, "The Work of God: Salvation," in *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014), 551.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley, *Historical Theology: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 117.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Keathley, "The Work of God: Salvation," in *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014), 552.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Brian L. Hanson, "Middle Ages," in *The Essential Lexham Dictionary of Church History*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Keathley, "The Work of God: Salvation," in *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014), 552.

3. It was during this time that the list of sacraments was expanded from baptism and the Lord's Supper, which the Catholic's call the Eucharist. The Catholic's added confirmation (the bestowing of the status of full membership in the Church), penance (acts of contrition to have one's sins absolved), extreme unction (last rites for one who is dying), orders (ordination of priests and ministers), and marriage (as symbol of Christ and the Church), for a total of seven sacraments.<sup>13</sup>
4. During this time, praying to the saints on behalf of the dead became prevalent. "Salvation was understood to be a lifelong progression of being made holy, and for many within the Church, the process was not finished by the time they died. Therefore, most parishioners expected to spend a time of unknown duration in purgatory where their remaining sins would be purged. The faithful would intercede with the saints, particularly Mary, for the deliverance of their departed loved ones."<sup>14</sup>

#### C. The \_\_\_\_\_

1. "The Reformation came about with Martin Luther's rediscovery of the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace alone, and in this way the Reformation can also be described as the recovery of Augustine's doctrine of grace. However, the Reformers went beyond Augustine and further refined his teaching by emphasizing the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone."<sup>15</sup>
2. The Reformer's teaching has been summarized into five main points: Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Sola Christus, and Sola de Gloria.
3. The most influential theologian of the Reformation was a man named John Calvin. Calvin was a French Reformer who pastored in Geneva, Switzerland. His most significant work is called *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. John Calvin died in 1564.

#### D. The \_\_\_\_\_

1. "The founder of the Arminian party was Jacob Arminius (1560–1609). He studied in Geneva under Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, and became a professor of theology at the University of Leyden in 1603."<sup>16</sup>
2. Arminius came to reject the teachings of Calvin and had quite a following.
3. The controversy began during the early 1600s, and it spread all over Holland, where the Reformed Church was the overwhelming majority. The Arminians drew up their creed in Five Articles and laid it before the state authorities of Holland in 1610 under the name Remonstrance, signed by forty-six ministers.<sup>17</sup>
4. "The official Calvinistic response came from the Synod of Dort which was held November 13, 1618, to May 9, 1619, to consider the Five Articles. There were eighty-four members and eighteen secular commissioners. The Synod wrote what has come to be known as the Canons of Dort. These are still part of the church confession of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church. They state the



<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 553.

<sup>16</sup> John Piper, *Five Points* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Five Points of Calvinism in response to the Five Articles of the Arminian Remonstrants.”<sup>18</sup>

5. The Five Points of Calvinism did not attempt to encompass all that they believed, but rather the points emerged as a response to the Arminians, who chose these five points to disagree with.<sup>19</sup>

## II. What is the Arminian View of Soteriology?

### A. Article 1

1. “That God, by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ's sake, and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, shall believe on this his Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith, through this grace, even to the end; and, on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath, and to condemn them as alienate from Christ.”<sup>20</sup>
2. “This article accepts predestination as including both election to salvation and reprobation to condemnation. But it puts both of these decrees *after* man's voluntary fall into sin, and it makes both of these decrees conditional upon the respective faith or unbelief of the individuals who are the objects of election or reprobation.”
3. “God's election is grounded in his foresight of faith and perseverance, and his reprobation in the foresight of unbelief.”<sup>21</sup>
4. This article argues that election is determined not by God before the foundation of the world, but that man's faith in God determines it. It rejects the idea that man is incapable of turning to Christ of his own volition and leaves salvation in the hands of man's free will.

### B. Article 2

1. “That, agreeably thereto, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except for the believer.”
2. “This article emphasizes unlimited or universal atonement, and yet makes clear that not all are actually saved by that atonement; only believers experience its redemptive effects.”<sup>22</sup>
3. “The intent of the redemptive work of Christ was the salvation of all human beings but forgiveness is actually given only to those who believe.”<sup>23</sup>
4. This article was put forth to rebuke the idea that was promoted by Calvin that Christ's atonement provided redemption only for the elect.

### C. Article 3

1. “That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostacy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do anything that is truly good (such as saving faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Picirilli, Robert E. 2002. *Grace, Faith, Free Will : Contrasting Views of Salvation : Calvinism and Arminianism*. Nashville, Tenn.: Randall House Publications, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 207.

<sup>22</sup> Picirilli, Robert E. 2002. *Grace, Faith, Free Will : Contrasting Views of Salvation : Calvinism and Arminianism*. Nashville, Tenn.: Randall House Publications, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 207–208.

all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will and effect what is truly good.”

2. This article defends the truth that man cannot please God in a state of sin, but that he must be born again of the Holy Spirit, thus changing man's natural inclination towards sin. It highlights that no one has the power within himself to turn to God without the assistance of God's grace.<sup>24</sup>

#### D. Article 4

1. “That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good, even to this extent, that the regenerate man himself, without prevenient or assisting, awakening, following and cooperative grace, can neither think, will, nor do good, nor withstand any temptations to evil; so that all good deeds or movements, that can be conceived, must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. But as represents the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible, inasmuch as it is written concerning many, that they have resisted the Holy Ghost.”
2. The fourth article was written to continue the thought of the third, while adding a clause. It teaches that God's grace can be resisted and that God's grace never overpowers man's free will.

#### E. Article 5

1. “That those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith, and have thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit, have thereby full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory; it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Ghost; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends to them his hand, and if only they are ready for the conflict, and desire his help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling, so that they, by no craft of power of Satan, can be misled nor plucked out of Christ's hands. But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scriptures, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our minds.”<sup>25</sup>
2. “The final article is the longest. It shows that the early Arminians, although they had not fully made up their minds, were open to the view that one may be lost after being saved. This had not been one of the key issues in the controversy, although it had been raised. The statement represents a cautious and early feeling on the subject. Ultimately, the Arminians would come to express this view without such hesitation, standing in opposition to the Calvinistic belief in necessary perseverance.”<sup>26</sup>
3. This article promotes the idea that a Christian can lose his salvation because he is the one who is living the Christian life while only being assisted by the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Keathley, “The Work of God: Salvation,” in *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014), 555.

<sup>25</sup> Picirilli, Robert E. 2002. *Grace, Faith, Free Will : Contrasting Views of Salvation : Calvinism and Arminianism*. Nashville, Tenn.: Randall House Publications, 13-15.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

### III. What is the Calvinistic View of Soteriology?

#### A. Total Depravity

1. "A reference to the belief that humans begin life with all aspects of their nature corrupted by the effects of sin; thus, all their actions will lack totally pure motives. This does not mean, however, that they are as wicked as they can possibly be."<sup>27</sup>
  - Grudem prefers to call this point "total inability." He defines it as "man's total lack of spiritual good and inability to do good before God."<sup>28</sup>
2. What this means in their soteriological viewpoint is that because man is wholly depraved, man is unable to turn in faith until God has initiated that faith in them.
3. "Our sinful corruption is so deep and so strong as to make us slaves of sin and morally unable to overcome our own rebellion and blindness. This inability to save ourselves from ourselves is *total*. We are utterly dependent on God's grace to overcome our rebellion, give us eyes to see, and effectively draw us to the Savior."<sup>29</sup>

#### B. Unconditional Election

1. This means that "God's choice of certain persons to salvation is not dependent on any foreseen virtue or faith on their part."<sup>30</sup>
2. "God's election is an unconditional act of free grace that was given through his Son Jesus before the world began. By this act, God chose, before the foundation of the world, those who would be delivered from bondage to sin and brought to repentance and saving faith in Jesus."<sup>31</sup>

#### C. Limited Atonement

1. "The view that Christ's death actually paid for the sins of those whom he knew would ultimately be saved. A preferable term for this view is "particular redemption" in that the power of the atonement is not limited, but rather it is fully effective for particular people."<sup>32</sup>
2. "The atonement of Christ is *sufficient* for all humans and *effective* for those who trust him. It is not limited in its worth or sufficiency to save all who believe. But the *full, saving effectiveness* of the atonement that Jesus accomplished is limited to those for whom that saving effect was prepared. The availability of the total sufficiency of the atonement is for all people. Whosoever will—whoever believes—will be covered by the blood of Christ. *And* there is a divine design in the death of Christ to accomplish the promises of the new covenant for the chosen bride of Christ. Thus Christ died for all people, but not for all in the same way."<sup>33</sup>

#### D. Irresistible Grace

1. "This refers to the fact that God effectively calls people and also gives them regeneration, both of which guarantee that we will respond in saving faith. This term is subject to

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<sup>27</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 938.

<sup>28</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1526.

<sup>29</sup> John Piper, *Five Points* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 938.

<sup>31</sup> John Piper, *Five Points* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1514.

<sup>33</sup> John Piper, *Five Points* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2013).

misunderstanding since it *seems* to imply that people do not make a voluntary, willing choice in responding to the gospel.”<sup>34</sup>

2. “This means that the resistance that all human beings exert against God every day (Rom. 3:10-12; Acts 7:51) is wonderfully overcome at the proper time by God’s saving grace for undeserving rebels whom he chooses freely to save.”<sup>35</sup>

#### E. Perseverance of the Saints

1. “The doctrine that all those who are truly 'born again' will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly 'born again.’”<sup>36</sup>
2. “We believe that all who are justified will win the fight of faith. They will persevere in faith and will not surrender finally to the enemy of their souls. This perseverance is the promise of the new covenant, obtained by the blood of Christ, and worked in us by God himself, yet not so as to diminish, but only to empower and encourage, our vigilance; so that we may say in the end, I have fought the good fight, but it was not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusion:

The study of soteriology highlights both the unity and diversity within Christian thought regarding salvation. Each era, from the Patristic to the Reformation, has contributed insights and raised questions that remain relevant today. Continued study of these views can deepen understanding and encourage thoughtful reflection on how Christians approach the doctrine of salvation.

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<sup>34</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1513.

<sup>35</sup> John Piper, *Five Points* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1520.

<sup>37</sup> John Piper, *Five Points* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2013).