

*****This is my position paper on soteriology provided to the credentialing committee within Church of God of And. It describes my biblically based beliefs and should answer many common questions and provides an example of my awareness of this common complexity within churches.*****

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Theological Position – Sin and Salvation

Sin and salvation are fundamental components to understanding how God loves us, intends for us to be in His kingdom, and why we are the way we are. Sin and salvation contemplations lead to some of the most profound questions about faith. Why are we sinful? If God loves us, why would He punish us? If God is good, why does He allow evil? Although biblical responses to these questions differ, having a general understanding of soteriology (salvation), hamartiology (sin), and having a biblically grounded articulation of one's position on these is fundamental to pastoral leadership and stewardship of people's journey towards Christ.

Historical Perspective

Sin and salvation, although equally invited into the conversation, salvation is much more highly debated in both our modern culture and the historical cultures. For salvation to be needed, there needs to be something to be saved from and a mechanism that does the saving. We are needing to be saved not only from sin, but also the effect of sin, which is separation from the Father. Sin has a robust definition with significant expanded treatment (Ryrie), however a simple treatment

would be *doing anything God doesn't want us to do* leading us to miss the mark.

Sin and the corruption of man is for the most part, more agreeable amongst the kingdom of God citizens than how one is “saved” or receives salvation. Excluding offshoots of Gnosticism in both modern and ancient times, a few heretics like Maricon of Sinope and modern Rob Bell claiming either all are saved or there are multiple Gods, applying the idea of sin remains relatively consistent. Because of what happened in the Garden in Genesis 3, (ESV) sin and disobedience to God, ergo, *impurity* has entered into man and we are ineligible of being with the father due to our lack of purity and the purifying qualities of the Father. Even though there is tremendous scholarship and meaningful discussion on the nature of sin, most Christian denominations and sects would share a similar articulation explaining sin keeps man from God and we need something that restores us to God by doing something with our sin. Who, what, how, and why is where the discussion gets convoluted.

Salvation is much more diverse in its theological expanded treatment than sin, or at least more nuanced. With salvation comes *atonement*.

What is the atoning “element” that makes up for man’s inability to self-purify to be eligible to be with the Father? For Christians, this atoning “element” is Jesus, His birth, death, and resurrection. Debate about how the saving qualities of Jesus are applied to the adherents life are heated, controversial, and in some cases lethal in a historical sense.

(Calvin EDU) There’s a stark lack of consensus among scholars today still arguing about what the church fathers taught or thought. (Cottrell)

Atonement, how Jesus on the cross accomplished something for man has many variations and interpretations. There are at least 7 atonement theories that range from ransom, Christus Victor, penal substitution, and more. (Morrison) In almost all cases, the vast majority of Christians believe the work of Jesus on the cross, somehow, created the necessary pathway man walks to be restored to the God.

With sin and atonement being discussed, another hotly debated questions is “who is saved?”. Is it the elect? Is it the pre-destined? Is it anyone who chooses to have faith? This debate and where a Christian exercises their subscription to faith will shape the nature of their preaching, witnessing, evangelism, how they understand God’s sovereignty, and how the very community one is in experiences fellowship. *Who is saved and what is the nature of salvation? ie. permanent, able to be lost*, are community defining questions.

The two large camps today are those of an Arminian/free will/provisionist/Molinist proclivity and the Calvinist/theistic determinists/authoritarian sovereignty proclivity both expanded on today from their main introduction and contention at the Synod of Dort, post reformation. These two large camps we’re established by two Reformation Ministers, John Calvin and Jacobus Arminius with very different thoughts on how soteriology works. (Britannica) The single largest dividing question between these two camps is this : *Which came first, faith or regeneration?* Depending on how one reads 1st Tim 2:4, John 3:16, Colossians 2:12, Ephesians 1, Romans 9, John 6, (ESV) and more will alter how one understands mans exercise of free will, either

determinist (we feel free in our decisions, but they're predetermined) or libertarian (we are choosing our decisions without them being pre-determined). Other varying words are *election* and *pre-destination*. Are people pre-destined to have faith? Are people elected to have faith? *OR*- Are those that have faith pre-determined to have faith? Are those that have faith elected? This near "chicken or the egg first" paradox is a not only a large dividing line in Christendom but gets even more nuanced in the two camps with multiple off shoots in both directions. Within the Arminian-ish camp are also provisionists with varying sects and within the Calvinist-ish camp are 5 point, 4 point, infralapsarian, supralapsarian and more varying offshoots of thinkers. In general, these varying practitioners see others that disagree with them as Christian, but wrong or even heretical in their interpretation and application of scripture. Often, all parties accuse the other of being a poor Biblicist and/or theologian. All parties are common in claiming "we're just reading the bible...we're doing what it says" while accusing the other of inappropriate eisegesis.

After one is saved, either through choosing to have faith or being pre-determined to do be regenerated comes the understanding of the enduring qualities of salvation. Are only the elect saved, and if they later in life become an apostate were they never actually saved? Is one saved then always saved regardless of lifestyle? Does one have a stewardship responsibility of their salvation and is something that can be lost? As the debate continues regarding the way in which one arrives to salvation, another is asking if salvation is permanent or not. This debate also invokes the sovereignty of God, free-will, determinism, and

more. Thinkers are also armed with biblical passages like 1st Tim 4:1, Hebrews 3:12, Luke 8:13, 2nd Tim. 4:3-4, 1st John 3:9, Romans 8:30, John 10:28, (ESV) that support a plurality of interpretations that again lead to how one experiences preaching, fellowship, and Christian disciplines.

Historical Christianity would suggest man is sinful because of the fall of man in the garden and is fundamentally corrupted from birth. Because of this, humanity needs a restoring element and this element is Jesus. *How* Jesus saves, what His actions accomplished, and in what way are dividing lines within the kingdom and shed light as to why there are hundreds of “*brands*” of Christians.

PERSONAL

“He [God] lets him decide. And this is so important with respect to evil decisions – that God doesn’t move creatures to do evil and then punishes them for what he makes them do. Now, of course our view has to be biblical.” – William Lane Craig (Reasonable Faith)

I believe man has libertarian free will. Meaning, man has the responsibility “response/able” to act on his own volition towards or away from God. I absolutely disagree with God having created a being having always planned to punish them for eternity for something He made them do. I don’t think this is biblical, and I don’t think this even academically reflected well in the bible or church history. Neither biblically, pragmatically, or philosophically do I believe this is correct. I believe the proof-texts regularly presented by the many varieties of

theistic-determinists are easily rebutted towards a God that infused free will into His creation he's wanting to receive love from by freedom of worship. Salvation is conditional to the mans actions ***through*** free will.

Here is my simple biblical systematic for my free-will position. (ESV)

Free Will – Humans Choose

John 3:16 – Whosoever

Col 2:12 – Raised ***by*** faith not to faith

Lk 5:32 – Called sinners

Matt 11:28-30 – Come all

Jn 6:51 – Whoever eats

Acts 13:39 – In all who believe

Rom 1:16-17 – All who believe

Rom 9:30 – Righteousness by faith

Rom 5:1-1 – Grace by faith

Eph 1:13 – Believe and be saved

1st Peter 1:1-2 – Election for those that choose to believe

Atonement For All

Isiah 53:6 – Iniquity of man put on Christ

Matt 18 – Father wants none to perish

John 1:7 – Blood of Christ for all

John 1:29 – Jesus takes sin away

John 12:46 – All who believe will be in the light

Rom 3:23 – All are justified through grace

Rom 5:6 – Jesus dies for ungodly

Rom 5:15 – Free gift for all

Rom 10:13 – Whoever calls will be saved

2nd Cor 5:14-15 One died for all

1st Tim 2:3-6 – Jesus was ransom for all

1st Tim 4:10 – Savior for all who believe

2nd Peter 3:9 – All called to repentance

1st John 4:14 – Savior for all

1st John 2:2 – Atone for the sins of the world

Rev 22:17 – Let those who thirst drink

Man Can Resist Grace

Jer 7:24 – the stubborn went backwards

Lk 7:30 – Rejected counsel of God

Acts 7:51 – Resist the Holy Spirit

Romans 10:16 - Not all welcome the good news

2nd Cor 6:1 – Ignore God’s grace

Prevenient Grace – (For All)

Jer 31:3 – Loved with everlasting love

Rom 2:4 – Gods kindness leads to repentance

Rom 10:14-15 Hear word of God to come to faith

Titus 2:11-14 – God grace offers salvation to all people

Conditional Perseverance (Apostacy is possible)

Matt 24:24 – Many will be led astray, even the elect

Matt 10:22- Some will endure to the end

Gal 5:4 – Fallen from grace

1st Tim 4:1- Some will fall away from belief

Heb 3:12-14 – Fall Away from God

James 5:19 – Wanders from the truth

2nd Peter 3:16-17 – Fall from secure position

** Text summarized to my simple interpretation for shorthand reference. I have this list handwritten in the intro to the new testament in one of my bibles.*

Philosophically and pragmatically, I believe only after biblical precedence is established and demonstrated then the very nature of God and God’s love can be discussed philosophically.

My simple treatment answers to specific questions

Q. Are all men sinful and depraved? **A.** Yes, but not unable to choose faith.

Q. Who are the elect? **A.** Those that have chosen to have faith.

Q. What is pre-destination? **A.** Those that choose to have faith, have been pre-determined/destined to receive salvation.

Q. Do you have a low view of sovereignty because you believe in free will? **A.** No. I believe God’s sovereignty is supreme because He has

ultimate authority and has given man through His sovereignty, free will to choose or reject Him. Sovereign as King and Lord, not as puppeteer.

Q. How is God in control of all things and uses all things? **A.** *Providence. God will use through providence all things to glorify Him, even if He didn't ordain the action/event/person.*

Q. Does God determine people to be in their situation. **A.** *No. God doesn't determine for some to believe, some not to believe, some to harm, some not to harm, some to sin, some not to sin. God's sovereignty affords free will, and God's providence moves the moment to His Glory.*

Q. Can a person lose their salvation? **A.** *Yes. Not like losing one's keys or wallet, but one can consciously object to a faith previously prescribed to. This is typically a process, painful, emotional, and time consuming. A person is very secure in their salvation, but it can be abandoned, often times correlating to a significant personal traumatic experience.*

CHURCH OF GOD

The Church of God of And. [CHOG] has an Arminian proclivity with a Wesleyan-Holiness compliment. CHOG would align with the five points laid out by James Arminius from the Synod of Dort, 1) Conditional Election, 2) Universal Atonement 3) Natural Incapacity 4) Prevenient Grace 5) Conditional Perseverance. CHOG would introduce additional thinking suggesting that by choosing to have faith therefore receiving salvation, holiness living is to be pursued by the follower by two motivations. 1) Personal Desire to live a life pleasing to God and 2) Able

to live a life more pleasing to God as a result of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in the follower's life. (Rice)

In regard to sin, CHOG would believe man is depraved, yet still able to choose to have faith. By choosing to have faith, one can achieve victory over sin. This is not unbiblical perfectionism but realizing Jesus can make us as perfect as we can be. However, we will not be glorified until Jesus returns. (Jackson p87, 139)

In regard to free will and God's grace, CHOG would suggest individuals don't experience an overwhelming un-resistible sensation for God's call, but instead a call that is enduring, persuasive, influencing, and drawing ultimately letting the sinner freely choose to follow or not. (Jackson p143)

In regard to security, CHOG believes one should have significant confidence in their eternal security. Followers have a robust, rich, enduring faith that is in the end, theirs to steward. God provides faith as a gift, however as other gifts, one can neglect and ignore their gifting to the point of apostasy. "We must persist in faith, or else we will be lost." – Mark Jackson (Jackson p145)

CHOG is a confident movement in their Arminian-Wesleyan roots unashamed and unafraid of the Gospel, its truth and power, and the responsibility of free-willed enabled beings choosing faith, stewarding that faith to boldness while pursuing holiness that cements one

assurance of salvation in eternity through a temporary never perfected yet perfectible vessel.

ORTHOPRAXY

Of all community defining doctrinal differences in the American church, I believe this topic of sin and salvation is vital to get right and in alignment within a church, its leadership, and part of the elder vetting/training process. Pastoral and elder alignment is extremely important and these topics are not to be taken lightly. Some churches have left CHOG over this very doctrinal difference. Before elders/pastors are installed they should be able to easily articulate both basic Arminian/Calvin ideals and align with the Arminian slant to some degree and in decisive ways. If individuals are new to this thinking or soteriology in general, basic equipping and then alignment should be pursued before installation takes place.

If leadership doesn't share an aligned understanding of how salvation works, how evangelism works, what one persons responsibilities are, then preaching and discipleship will either be shallow and/or inconsistent. With God's calling on my life and whatever the pastoral space He's entrusted me to steward, I will and do regularly explain and declare my own and CHOG's view on sin, salvation, and holiness from a

biblical basis. The very nature of one's biblical view on these topics will shape culture within a community. To the extent of congregants thinking they either **do or do not** have any influence in the world with their personal story of transformation, sharing the gospel, serving, loving, providing for the poor, the needy, the naked, the hungry, the thirsty, the alone. Congregants **may or may not** believe they have any responsibility to evangelize. Congregants **may or may not** believe that they have any personal responsibility in the world and their only duty is to show up to church and learn which leads to an inward focused community. I believe people are agents of transformation for Jesus in the world. I believe any person, any individual can be used by God to draw, influence, and lead another's free will to a life altering and eternity establishing decision that not only brings the ultimate purpose, meaning, and security to this temporary life lived, but to a restoration of eligibility to be within the Father. I do consider theistic-determinists thinkers and believers out there as Christians, but I believe they're deeply wrong, misleading towards others, and in the end doing more harm than good for the kingdom. I will lovingly defend Arminian-Wesleyan/provisionist/free will Christian thinking and holiness living, biblically, pragmatically, and philosophically.

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