

## Calvinism vs. Arminianism The Biblical Balance

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At the heart of the controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism is the emphasis on the sovereignty of God by the Calvinists and on the free will of man, or human responsibility, by the Arminians. Arminian theology teaches that man has free will and that God will never override or take that free will away, that God has obligated Himself to respect the free moral agency and capacity of free choice with which He created us.

Calvinism, on the other hand, emphasizes that God is in total control of everything, and that nothing can happen that He does not plan and direct, including man's salvation. Certainly, the Bible does teach that God is sovereign (Psalm 135:6; Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:11), and that believers are predestined and elected by God (Romans 8) to spend eternity with Him. Nowhere, however, does the Bible ever associate election with damnation. On the contrary, the Scriptures teach that God elects for salvation, but that unbelievers are in hell by their own choice. Every passage of the Bible that deals with election deals with it in the context of salvation, not damnation. No one is elect for hell.

The idea of total depravity is consistent with Scripture (Ephesians 2:1, Romans 3:11), but the doctrine of limited atonement, that Jesus did not die for the sins of the whole world, is clearly anti-Biblical (John 3:16, I Timothy 2:6, 1 Peter 2:1, I John 2:2). The Bible teaches that Jesus died for everyone's sins and that everyone is able to be saved, if they will repent and turn to Christ. Limited atonement is a non-Biblical doctrine. (John 3:16,17; Romans 5:8, 18; 2Corinthians 5:14,15; 1Timothy 2:4; 4:10; Hebrews 2:9; 10:29; 2Peter 2: 1; 1John 2:2; 4:14.). And, many Scriptures teach that a true believer is safe and secure in Christ, that salvation doesn't depend on our ability to keep ourselves, but on God's ability to keep us (1 John 5:11-13; John 10:28; Romans 5:1 and 8:1). The only condition for salvation is faith in Christ (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9).

On the other hand, the Bible teaches us that we must abide in Christ (John 15; Luke 13:14; Colossians 1:29; 2Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 6:4-6; 1Peter 1:10) to persevere in salvation. Like a river that flows between two banks, so the truth of God's Word flows between the extremes of Calvinism and Arminianism. Election and predestination are Biblical doctrines. God knows everything and, therefore, He cannot learn anything or be surprised by anything. Thus, He knows, and has known from eternity past, who will exercise their free will to accept Him and who will reject Him. The former are the elect, the latter are non-elect. As D. L. Moody once said, "the whosoever wills are the elect, and the whosoever wont's are the non-elect." Every person who is not saved will have only himself to blame; God will not send anyone to hell, but many people will choose to go there by exercising their free will to reject Christ.

On the other hand, no one who is saved will be able to take any of the credit. Our salvation, from start to finish, is 100% God's work, and is based entirely on the finished work of the Cross. We were dead in trespasses and sins, destined for hell, when God in His grace, drew us to Himself, convinced us of our sin, and of our need for a Savior, and gave us the authority to call Jesus Lord.

Moreover, the concept of a limited atonement, that Jesus only died for the elect, and not for the sins of all people, is clearly unbiblical. The Bible is crystal clear that Jesus' death on the cross was for all people, and that there is sufficient power in His blood to cleanse away every sin. "Whosoever will may come" is meaningless if man has no free will and no ability to choose God.

As has been pointed out, we are looking at two sides of the same coin. Election is God's side, free will is our side. Someone once said that as we enter heaven, we see emblazoned over the gateway the words "Whosoever will may come;" then as we enter and look back at the backside of the same gateway, we see inscribed what the words "Elect from the foundation of the earth." Election is God's side of the coin we call salvation, human responsibility is our side.

I am Arminian in the sense that I believe in our insistence upon Unlimited Atonement and Free Will. I don't agree with the Calvinist teaching that some people are elected or predestined to damnation. Christ's death was for all who choose to believe.

At the same time, I am quite Calvinist in my refusal to see humans as anything but totally depraved. But how can totally depraved humans choose God's way? The answer is Divine Grace, that grace which precedes any effort and precludes any merit on our part.

I believe that salvation is by grace alone. And because salvation is by grace and not human achievement, it is possible to know that you are saved. The inner witness of God's Spirit to the certainty of salvation is the birthright of every believer. This settled assurance is ours only as we abide in Christ and live lives of obedience.

I recognize the deadliness of sin and take seriously the admonition of Scripture to endure faithfully in our faith to the end. A practice of willful sinning and refusal to confess and repent of sin reveals that either the person was never genuinely saved in the first place or that, after salvation, a choice was made to serve sin rather than God. In either case, this person is lost and needs to confess and repent of his sins to be restored to a right relationship with God.

I also believe that the purpose of salvation is righteousness - actual holiness. Righteousness is not the means of salvation, but the result of salvation. God not only imputes - credits Christ's righteousness to our account - but also imparts His righteousness to us - leading us to seek the reality of righteousness in our own lives through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. To be God's child is to manifest His character - nothing more, nothing less.

I am a free moral agent, responsible for my own sin, hopelessly lost. Jesus not only died for me, He drew me to Himself with bands of loving kindness and grace, convicted me of my sin, gave me the power to call Him Lord, and will one day present me faultless before His presence with great joy. I am, by His grace, His child. And yet, I am still free to walk with Him or not walk with Him. And what applies to me applies to every human being. Jesus died for all of us and desires fellowship with all of us. Whosoever will may come and receive of His forgiveness and grace and salvation. Innocent babies who die are safe in heaven. God's election excludes no one; Jesus' atonement includes everyone.

It is imperative to remember that both Calvinism and Arminianism are systems of theology devised in the 1600's. Both systems contain essential elements of truth, but neither can be substituted for reading and believing the Word of God. The Apostolic Church knew nothing of either system, they simply believed what God had revealed.

I choose to simply read and believe the Word of God. I try to learn the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation, verse by verse, in context. I at times sound like a Calvinist, preaching those passages which emphasize God's sovereignty, while, at other times, I sound like an Arminian, as I preach those passages which emphasize man's responsibility.

Does the Bible contradict itself? No, it doesn't. The key is balance - to stay focused on the Word of God, and not to become distracted by the doctrines of men.