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# THE REFORMED FAITH

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# **The Reformed Faith**

by Loraine Boettner

## **The Sovereignty of God**

The purpose of this article is to set forth, in plain language and in terms easily understood, the basic differences between the Calvinistic and the Arminian system to theology, and to show what the Bible teaches concerning these subjects. The harmony that exists between the various doctrines of the Christian faith is such that error in regard to any one of them produces more or less distortion in all of the others.

There are in reality only two types of religious thought. There is the religion of faith, and there is the religion of works. We believe that what has been known in Church History as Calvinism is the purest and most consistent embodiment of the religion of faith, while that which has been known as Arminianism has been diluted to a dangerous degree by the religion of works and that it is therefore an inconsistent and unstable form of Christianity. In other words, we believe that Christianity comes to its fullest and purest expression in Reformed Faith.

In the early part of the fifth century these two types of religious thought came into direct conflict in a remarkably clear contrast as embodied in two fifth-century theologians, Augustine and Pelagius. Augustine pointed men to God as the source of all true spiritual wisdom and strength, while Pelagius threw men back on themselves and said that they were able in their own strength to do all that God commanded, otherwise God would not command it. We believe that Arminianism represents a compromise between these two systems, but that while in its more evangelical form, as in early Wesleyanism, it approaches the religion of faith, it nevertheless does contain serious elements of error.

We are living in a day in which practically all of the historic churches are being attacked from within by unbelief. Many of them have already succumbed. And almost invariably the line of descent has been from Calvinism to Arminianism, from Arminianism to Liberalism, and then to Unitarianism. And the history of Liberalism and Unitarianism shows that they deteriorate into a social gospel that is too weak to sustain itself. We are convinced that the future of Christianity is bound up with that system of theology historically called "Calvinism." Where the God centered principles of Calvinism have been abandoned, there has been a strong tendency downward into the depths of man centered naturalism or secularism. Some have declared - rightly, we believe - that there is no consistent stopping place between Calvinism and atheism.

The basic principle of Calvinism is the sovereignty of God. This represents the purpose of the Triune God as absolute and unconditional, independent of the whole finite creation, and originating solely in the eternal counsel of His will. He appoints the course of nature and directs the course of history down to the minutest details. His decrees therefore are eternal, unchangeable,

holy, wise and sovereign. They are represented in the Bible as being the basis of the divine foreknowledge of all future events, and not conditioned by that foreknowledge or by anything originating in the events themselves.

Every thinking person readily sees that some sovereignty rules his life. He was not asked whether or not he would have existence, when or what or where he would be born, whether in the twentieth century or before the Flood, whether male or female, whether white or black, whether in the United States, or China, or Africa. All of those things were sovereignly decided for him before he had any existence. It has been recognized by Christians in all ages that God is the Creator and Ruler of the world, and that as such He is the ultimate source of all power that is found in the world. Hence nothing can come to pass apart from His sovereign will. Otherwise He would not be truly GOD. And when we dwell on this truth we find that it involves considerations which establish the Calvinistic and disprove the Arminian position.

By virtue of the fact that God has created everything that exists, He is the absolute Owner and final Disposer of all that He has made. He exerts not merely a general influence, but actually rules in the affairs of men (Acts 4:24-28). Even the nations are as the small dust of the balance when compared with His greatness (Is. 40:12-17). Amid all the apparent defeats and inconsistencies of our human lives, God is actually controlling all things in undisturbed majesty. Even the sinful actions of men can occur only by His permission and with the strength that he gives the creature. And since He permits not unwillingly but willingly, then all that comes to pass - including even the sinful actions and ultimate destiny of men - must be, in some sense, in accordance with what He has eternally purposed and decreed. Just in proportion as this is denied, God is excluded from

the government of the world, and we have only a finite God. Naturally, some problems arise which in our present state of knowledge we are not able fully to explain. But that is not a sufficient reason for rejecting what the Scriptures and the plain dictates of reason affirm to be true.

And shall we not believe that God can convert a sinner when He pleases? Cannot the Almighty, the omnipotent Ruler of heaven and earth, change the character of the creatures He has made? He changed the water into wine at Cana and converted Saul on the road to Damascus. The leper said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (Matt. 8:2). And at a word his leprosy was cleansed. Let us not believe, as do the Arminians, that God cannot control the human will, or that He cannot regenerate a soul when He pleases. He is as able to cleanse the soul as the body. If He chose He could raise up such a flood of Christian ministers, missionaries and workers of various kinds, and could so work through His Holy Spirit, that the entire world would be converted in a very short time. If He had purposed to save all men He could have sent hosts of angels to instruct them and to do supernatural works on the earth. He could have worked marvelously in the heart of every person so that no one would have been lost.

Since evil exists only by His permission, He could, if He chose, blot it out of existence. His power in this respect was shown, for instance, in the work of the destroying angel who in one night slew all of the first-born of the Egyptians (Ex. 12:29), and in another night slew 185,000 of the Assyrian army (II Kings 19:35). It was shown when the earth opened and swallowed Korah and his rebellious allies (Nu. 16:31-35). King Herod was smitten and died a horrible death (Acts 12:23). In Daniel 4:34-35 we read that the Most High God's "dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to

generation; and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

All of this brings out the basic principle of the Reformed Faith - the sovereignty of God. God created this world in which we find ourselves, He owns it, and He is running it according to His own sovereign good pleasure. God has lost none of His power, and it is highly dishonoring to Him to suppose that He is struggling along with the human race, doing the best He can to persuade men to do right, but unable to accomplish His eternal, unchangeable, holy, wise, and sovereign purpose.

Any system which teaches that the serious intentions of God can in some cases be defeated, and that man, who is not only a creature but a sinful creature, can exercise veto power over the plans of Almighty God, is in striking contrast to the biblical idea of his immeasurable exaltation by which He is removed from all weaknesses of humanity. That the plans of men are not always executed is due to a lack of power, or a lack of wisdom, or both. But since God is unlimited in these and in all other resources, no unforeseen emergencies can arise. To Him the causes for change have no existence. To assume that His plan fails and that he strives to no effect is to reduce Him to the level of His creatures and make Him no God at all.

## **Man's Totally Helpless Condition**

As we read the works of various Arminian writers, it seems that their first and perhaps most serious error is that they do not give sufficient importance to the sinful rebellion and spiritual separation of the human race from God that occurred in the fall of Adam. Some neglect it altogether, while for others it seems to be a far away event that has little influence in the lives of people today. But unless we insist on the reality of that spiritual separation from God, and the totally disastrous effect that it had on the entire human race, we shall never be able properly to appreciate our real condition or our desperate need of a Redeemer.

Perhaps it will help us to realize more clearly what fallen man's condition really is if we compare it with that of the fallen angels. Angels were created before man, and each angel was placed on test as an individual, personal, moral being. This apparently was a pure test of obedience, as was that of Adam. Some of the angels stood their test, for reasons only fully known to God, and, as a result, were then confirmed in a state of perfect angelic holiness, and are now the elect angels in heaven (I Tim. 5:21). But others fell and are now the demons that we read of in the Scriptures, the devil apparently being the one of highest rank among those who fell.

In Jude we read of "angels that kept not their own principality but left their proper habitation, he [God] hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (v.6). And in II Peter we read that "God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2:4). The devil and the demons are totally alienated from God, totally given over to sin, and without any hope of redemption. Their fate is described by Christ as that of being cast into "the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: (Matt. 25:41).



There is no redemption for fallen angels. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "For verily not to angels doth he give help, but he giveth help to the seed of Abraham" (2:16). Their fate is fixed and certain. For men and for angels endless punishment is the penalty for endless sinning against God. Some would try to make God appear unjust as though He inflicts endless punishment for sins committed only in this life. But lost men and lost angels or demons are endlessly in rebellion against God, and they endlessly receive punishment for that rebellion.

But when God created man a moral creature, He proceeded on a different plan than He did with the angelic order. Instead of creating all men at one time and placing them on test individually, He created one man, with a physical body, from whom the entire human race would descend, and who, because of his union with all of those who would come after him, could be appointed as the legal or federal head and representative of the entire human race. If he stood the test, he and all of his descendants, his children, would be confirmed in holiness and established in a state of perpetual creaturely bliss as were the holy angels. But if he fell, as did the other angels, he and all his posterity would be subject to eternal punishment. It was as if God said, "This time, if sin is to enter, let it enter by one man, so that redemption also can be provided by one man."

Therefore Adam in his representative capacity was placed on a test of pure human obedience. The penalty of disobedience was clearly set before him: "And Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17).

Hence, the clearly declared penalty for sin was death - exactly the same penalty that had been inflicted on the angels who fell. As with angels, it was purely a test of whether or not man would be an obedient and appreciative subject in the kingdom of heaven. It was a perfectly fair, simple test, clearly set forth, very much in Adam's favor, for which he would have no excuse if he disobeyed.

But, tragedy of tragedies, Adam fell. And the entire human race fell representatively in him. The consequences of his sin are all comprehended under the term death, in its widest sense. It was primarily spiritual death, or separation from God, that had been threatened. Adam did not die physically until 930 years after he fell. But he was spiritually estranged from God and died spiritually the very instant that he sinned. And from that instant his life became an unceasing march to the grave. Man in this life has not gone as far in the ways of sin as have the devil and the demons, for he still receives many blessings through common grace, such as health, wealth, family and friends, the beauties of nature, and he still is surrounded with many restraining influences. But he is on his way. And if not checked, man would eventually become as totally evil as are the demons. In his fallen state he fears God, tries to flee from Him, and literally hates Him, as do the demons. If left to himself he would remain forever in that condition, because as it is written, "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none that understandeth, There is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:10-11). Nothing, absolutely nothing, but a mighty supernatural act on the part of God can rescue him from that condition. Hence if he is to be rescued, God must take the initiative, must pay the penalty for him, must cleanse him from his guilt, and so reinstate him in holiness and righteousness.

And that is precisely what God does. He sovereignly picks a man up out of the kingdom of Satan, and places him in the kingdom of

heaven. Those are the elect that are referred to some 25 times in the Scriptures: Matt. 24:22: "For the elect's sake, whom he chose, he shortened those days" (at the destruction of Jerusalem). I Thess. 1:4: "Knowing, brethren, beloved of God, your election." Rom. 11:7: "The election obtained it, and the rest were hardened." Rom. 8:33: "Who shall lay anything to charge of God's elect"; and many more.

The Bible tells us that God has rescued a multitude of the human race from the penalty of their sins. In order to perform that work, Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, took upon Himself human nature through the miracle of the virgin birth, and was born into the human race as any normal child is born. God thus became incarnate, became one of us. Jesus then lived a perfectly sinless life among men as the representative of His people, placed Himself before His own law, and suffered in His own Person the penalty that God had prescribed for sin. In His sinless life He kept perfectly the law of God that Adam had broken, and so earned perfect righteousness for His people and thereby earned for them the right to enter heaven. What He suffered, as a Person of infinite value and dignity, was a just equivalent of what His people would have suffered in an eternity in hell. In this manner He freed His people from the law of sin and death. And as the fruits of that redemptive work are applied to those who have been given to the Son by the Father, they are said to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, that is, to be made alive spiritually, to be born again.

Paul expresses this broad truth when in the Epistle to the Romans he says:

"Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned ... But no as the trespass, so also is the free gift. For if by

the trespass of the one many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many ... so then as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation, even so through the one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification to life. For as through the one's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:12-19).

Unless one sees that contrast between the first and the second Adam, he will never understand the Christian system. And writing to the saints that were at Ephesus, Paul said, "And you did he make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins." And he goes on to say that we:

"...were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest, but God, being rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus: for by grace have ye been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, that no man should glory. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:1-10)

In Christian theology there are three separate and distinct acts of imputation. In the first place Adam's sin is imputed to all of us, his children, that is, judicially set to our account so that we are held responsible for it and suffer the consequences of it. This is commonly

known as the doctrine of Original Sin. In the second place, and in precisely the same manner, our sin is imputed to Christ so that He suffers the consequences of it. And in the third place, Christ's righteousness is imputed to us and secures for us entrance into heaven. We are, of course, no more personally guilty of Adam's sin than Christ is personally guilty of our sin, or than we are personally meritorious because of His righteousness. In each case it is a judicial transaction. We receive salvation from Christ in precisely the same way that we receive condemnation and ruin from Adam. In each case the result follows because of the close official union which exists between the persons involved. To reject any one of these three steps is to reject an essential part of the Christian system.

Thus we see the strict parallel between Adam and Christ in the matter of salvation. In the above passages Paul piles one phrase upon another stressing the fact that we were not merely sick, or spiritually disinclined, but spiritually dead. Christ Himself said, "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). And again He said, "Why do ye not understand my speech: even because ye cannot hear my words" (John 8:43). The unregenerate man cannot see the kingdom of God, nor hear in any spiritually discerning way the words spoken concerning it, much less can he get into it. Had we been left to ourselves we, like the fallen angels, would never have turned to God.

A spiritually dead person can no more give himself spiritual life than a physically dead person can give himself physical life. That requires a supernatural act on the part of God. We get into the family of God in precisely the same way that we get into our human family, by being born into it. By that supernatural act God Himself, through His Holy Spirit, sovereignly takes us out of the kingdom of Satan and places us in His spiritual kingdom by a spiritual rebirth.

And having once been born onto the kingdom of God, we can never become unborn. Since it took a supernatural act to bring us into a state of spiritual life, it would take another such act to take us out of that state. Hence the absolute certainty that those who have been regenerated and who therefore have become truly Christian will never lose their salvation, but will providentially be kept by the power of God through all the trials and difficulties of this life and will be brought into the heavenly kingdom. "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature" (II Cor. 5:17). "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them unto me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29). This is known as the doctrine of eternal security or the perseverance of the saints.

This gift of eternal life is not conferred upon all men, but only upon those whom God chooses. This does not mean that any who want to be saved are excluded, for the invitation is "He that will [KJV, whosoever will], let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). The fact is that a spiritually dead person cannot will to come. "No man can come unto me except the Father that sent me draw [literally, drags] him" (John 6:44). Only those who are quickened (make spiritually alive) by the Holy Spirit ever have that will or that desire. These in Scripture are called the elect. But in contrast with these, there is another group that we may call the non-elect. And concerning them Professor Floyd Hamilton has very appropriately written:

"All that God does is to let them alone and allow them to go their own way without interference. It is their nature to be evil, and God simply has foreordained to leave that nature unchanged. The picture often painted by opponents of Calvinism, of a cruel God refusing to save all who want to be saved, is a gross caricature. God saves all who want to be saved, but no one whose nature has not been changed wants to be saved."

## **Christ's Atonement**

We are not told why God does not save all mankind when all were equally undeserving, and when the sacrifice on Calvary was that of a Person of infinite value, amply sufficient to save all men had God so desired it. But the Scriptures do tell us that not all will be saved. However, we can say that the atonement, which was worked out at an enormous cost to God Himself, is His own property, and that He is at liberty to make whatever use of it He chooses. No man has any claim to any part of it. We are told repeatedly that salvation is by grace. And grace is favor shown to the undeserving, even to the ill-deserving. If any part of man's salvation were due to his own good works, then indeed there would be a difference in men, and those who had responded to the gracious offer could justly point the finger of scorn at the lost and say, "You had the same chance that I had. I accepted, but you refused. Therefore you have no excuse." But no. God has so arranged this system that those who are saved can only be eternally grateful that God has saved them.

It is not for us to ask why God does as He does, for the Scripture declares:

"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Or hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels fitted unto destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy which he afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he also called." (Rom. 9:20-24)

Only the Calvinist seems to take the fall of man seriously. A proper evaluation of the fall and of man's present hopeless condition is the missing element in so much of today's thinking, teaching and preaching. Arminianism seriously errs in assuming that man has sufficient ability to turn to God if only he will. The Calvinist insists that man is not merely sick or indisposed or just needs the right incentive, but that he is spiritually dead, and that the atonement of Christ does not merely make salvation an abstract possibility such that all men can turn to God if they will. The Calvinist holds that the atonement was an objective work accomplished in history which removed all legal barriers against those to whom it was to be applied, and that it would be followed by the work of the Holy Spirit subjectively applying the merits of that atonement to the hearts of those for whom it was divinely intended.

We call attention again to one of the most important verses in Scripture concerning the matter of salvation: "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him" (John 6:44). Another



like it is; "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and he that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). And to the Christians in Corinth, Paul wrote: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (I Cor. 2:14).

And how does God cause the elect to exercise faith? The answer is: In regeneration the Holy Spirit subdues man's heart to Himself, and imparts to man a new nature which loves righteousness and hates sin. He does not force man against his will, but makes him lovingly and spontaneously obedient to His will. When the Lord Jesus appeared to the hardened persecutor Saul as he was on the way to Damascus, he immediately became obedient to the Lord's will. "Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power," said the Psalmist (110:3). Thus God gives His people the will to come. That act on God's part, in the sub-conscious nature of the person, is known as regeneration, or as a new birth, or being born again. When a man is thus given a new nature, he reacts according to that nature, as do all of God's creatures. He then exercises faith and does good works characteristic of repentance as naturally as the grape vine produces grapes. Whereas sin was his natural element, now holiness becomes his natural element - not all at once, for he still has remnants of the old nature clinging to him, and as long as he remains in this world he still is in a sinful environment. But as his new nature is free to express itself he grows in righteousness; he enjoys reading God's Word, praying, and having fellowship with other Christians.

We therefore have to choose between an atonement of high efficiency which is perfectly accomplished, and an atonement of wide extension which is imperfectly accomplished. We cannot have both. If we had both we would have universal salvation. But the Arminian extends the atonement so widely that so far as its actual effect is concerned, it

has practically no value other than as an example of unselfish service. Dr. B. B. Warfield used a very simple illustration to present this truth. He said that the atonement is like pie dough - the wider you roll it the thinner it becomes. And the Arminian, in making it apply to all men, reduces its effectiveness to such an extent that it becomes practically no atonement at all.

Furthermore, for God to have laid the sins of all men on Christ would mean that as regards the lost He would be punishing their sins twice, once in Christ, and then again in them. Certainly that would be unjust. If Christ paid their debt, they are free, and the Holy Spirit would invariably bring them to faith and repentance. If the atonement was truly unlimited, it would mean that Christ died for multitudes whose fate already had been determined, who already were in hell at the time He suffered. If the atonement merely nullified the sentence that was against man so as to give him a new chance if he would exercise faith and obedience, it would mean that God was placing him on test again as was his ancestor Adam. But that kind of a test was tried and had its outcome long ago, even in a far more favorable environment. Carried to its logical conclusion, the theory of unlimited atonement leads to absurdity.

We should remember that Christ's suffering in His human nature, as He hung on the cross those six hours, was not primarily physical, but mental and spiritual. When He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," He was literally suffering the pangs of hell. For that is essentially what hell is, separation from God, separation from everything that is good and desirable. Such suffering is beyond our comprehension. But since He suffered as a divine-human person, His suffering was a just equivalent for all that His people would have suffered in an eternity in hell.

As a matter of fact, the redeemed man gains more through redemption in Christ than he lost through the fall of Adam. For in the incarnation God literally came into the human race and took human nature upon Himself, which nature Christ in His glorified body will retain forever, and evidently He will be the only visible God that we will see in heaven. Peter tells us that we now are "partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4); and Paul says that we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Think of that! Partakers of the divine nature, and joint-heirs with Christ! What greater blessing could God possibly confer upon us? As such we are superior to the angels, for they are designated in Scripture only as God's messengers, His servants.

Ultimately the Arminian is faced with precisely the same problem as is the Calvinist - that broader problem as to why a God of infinite holiness and power permits sin at all. In our present state of knowledge we can give only a partial answer. But the Calvinist faces up to that problem, acknowledges the Scriptural doctrine that all men had their fair and favorable chance in Adam, that God now graciously saves some of the fallen race while leaving others to go their own chosen sinful way and manifests His justice in their punishment. But having admitted foreknowledge, the Arminianism has no explanation as to why God purposefully and deliberately creates those who He knows will be lost and who will spend eternity in hell.

However, as regards the problem of evil, we can say that God created this world as a theater in which He would display His glory, His marvelous attributes for all of His creatures to see and admire - His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Here we are concerned primarily with His justice.

God's justice demands that goodness must be rewarded and that sin must be punished. And it is just as necessary that sin be punished as it is that goodness be rewarded. God would be unjust if He failed to do either. Therefore He created men and angels not as robots who would automatically produce good works as a machine produces bolts or tin cans but who would deserve no rewards, but as free moral agents, in His own image, capable, in Adam before the fall, of choosing between good and evil. He manifests His justice toward those whom He has purposed in grace to save by rewarding them for the good works that are found in Christ their Savior and credited to them, confirming them in holiness, and admitting them into heaven. And He manifests His justice toward those whom He has purposed to by-pass for their willing continuance in sin.

Likewise, if sin had been excluded, there could have been no adequate revelation God's most glorious attributes, grace, mercy, love and holiness, as is displayed in His redemption of sinners. Let us remember that the angels in heaven earned salvation through a covenant of works, by keeping God's law. As in the Case of Adam, they had been promised certain rewards if they obeyed. They did obey, and were confirmed in holiness. They have not experienced salvation by grace. There is an old hymn which says, "When I sing redemption's story, the angels will fold their wings and listen." And so it will be in the ultimate contrast between men and angels.

Hence the explanation of sin is that God permits it, but controls and overrules it for His own glory. If sin had been excluded from the creation those glorious attributes could never have been adequately displayed before His intelligent universe of men and angels, but for the most part would have remained forever hidden in the depths of the divine nature.

## God's Foreknowledge

The evangelical Arminian acknowledges that God has foreknowledge, and that He therefore is able to predict future events. But if God foreknows any future event, then that event is as fixed and certain as if foreordained. For foreknowledge implies certainty, and certainly implies foreordination. The evangelical Arminian does not deny that there is such a thing as election to salvation, for he cannot get rid of the words "elect" and "election," which occur some twenty-five times in the New Testament. But he tries to destroy the force of these words by saying that election is based on foreknowledge, that God looks down the broad avenue of the future and sees those who will respond to His gracious offer, and so elects them.

But in acknowledging foreknowledge, the Arminian makes a fatal concession. Figuratively speaking, he cuts his own throat, for the simple reason that as God foresees those who will be saved, He also sees those who will be lost! Why, then, does He create those who will be lost? Certainly, He is not under any obligation to create them. There is no power outside Himself forcing Him to do so. If He wants all men to be saved and is earnestly trying to save all men, He could at least refrain from creating those who, if created, certainly will be lost.

The Arminian cannot consistently hold to the foreknowledge of God and yet deny the doctrines of election and predestination. The question persists: Why does God create those who He knows will go to hell? It would be mere foolishness for Him to wish to save or try to save those who He knows will be lost. That would be for Him to work at cross purposes with Himself. Even a man has better sense than to

try to do what he knows he will not do or cannot do. The Arminian has no alternative but to deny the foreknowledge of God - and then he has only a limited, ignorant, finite God who in reality is not God at all in the true sense of that word. If election is based on foreknowledge, that makes it so meaningless that it becomes more confusing than enlightening. For even as regards the elect, what sense is there for God to elect those who He knows are going to elect themselves? That would be just plain nonsense.

## **The Universalistic Passages**

Probably the most plausible defense for Arminianism is found in the universalistic passages in Scripture. Three of the most quoted are: II Peter 3:9, "Not wishing [or, KJV, not willing] that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"; I Tim. 2:4, [God our Savior] "who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth"; and I Tim. 2:5,6, "...Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all."

In regard to these verses we must keep in mind that, as we have said earlier, God is the absolute sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth, and we are never to think of Him as wishing or striving to do what He knows He will not do. For Him to do otherwise would be for Him to act foolishly. Since Scripture tells us that some men are going to be lost, II Peter 3:9 cannot mean that God is earnestly wishing or striving to save all individual men. For if it were His will that every individual of mankind should be saved, then not one soul could be lost. "For who hath resisted his will?" (Rom. 9:19).

These verses simply teach that God is benevolent, and that He does not delight in the sufferings of His creatures any more than a human father delights in the punishment that he sometimes must inflict upon his son. The word "will" is used in different senses in Scripture as in our everyday conversation. It is sometimes used in the sense of "desire" or "purpose." A righteous judge does not will (desire) that anyone should be hanged or sentenced to prison, yet he wills (pronounces sentence) that the guilty person shall be punished. In the same sense and for sufficient reasons a man may will to have a limb removed, or an eye taken out, even though he certainly does not desire it.

Arminians insist that in II Peter 3:9 the words "any" and "all" refer to all mankind without exception. But it is important first of all to see to whom those words were addressed. In the first verse of chapter 1, we find that the epistle is addressed not to mankind at large, but to Christians: "...to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us." And in a preceding verse (3:1), Peter had addressed those to whom he was writing as "beloved." And when we look at the verse as a whole, and not merely at the last half, we find that it is not primarily a salvation verse at all, but a second coming verse! It begins by saying that "The Lord is not slacking concerning his promise" [singular]. What promise? Verse 4 tells us: "the promise of his coming." The reference is to His second coming, when He will come for judgment, and the wicked will perish in the lake of fire. The verse has reference to a limited group. It says that the Lord is "long-suffering to us-ward," His elect, many of whom had not yet been regenerated, and who therefore had not yet come to repentance. Hence we may quite properly read verse 9 as follows: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any of us should perish, but that all of us should come to repentance."

In regard to I Tim. 2:4,6 "Who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth ... who gave himself a ransom for all," is used in various senses. Oftentimes it means, not all men without exception, but all men without distinction - Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, men and women, rich and poor. And in I Tim. 2:4-6 it clearly is used in that sense. Through many centuries the Jews had been, with few exceptions, the exclusive recipients of God's saving grace. They had become the most intensely nationalistic and intolerant people in the world. Instead of recognizing their position as that of God's representatives to all the people of the world, they had taken those blessings to themselves. Even the early Christians for a time were inclined to appropriate the mission of the Messiah only to themselves. The salvation of the Gentiles was a mystery that had not been known in other ages (Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:27). So rigid was the pharisaic exclusivism that the Gentiles were called unclean, common, sinners of the Gentiles, even dogs; and it was not lawful for a Jew to keep company with or have any deals with a Gentile (John 4:9, Acts 10:28, 11:3). After an orthodox Jew had been out in the marketplace where he had come in contact with Gentiles he was regarded as unclean (Mark 7:4). After Peter had preached to the Roman Centurion Cornelius and the others who were gathered at his house, he was severely taken to task by the Church in Jerusalem, and we can almost hear the gasp of wonder when, after Peter told them what had happened, they said, "Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance to life" (Acts 22:15), that is, not to every individual in the world, but to Jews and Gentiles alike. Used in this sense the word "all" has no reference to individuals, but simply to mankind in general.

When it was said of John the Baptist that "There went out unto him all the country of Judea, and all they of Jerusalem; and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5),



we know that not every individual did so respond. We read that after Peter and John had healed the lame man at the door of the temple, "all men glorified God for that which was done" (Acts 4:21). Jesus told his disciples that they would be "hated of all men" for His name's sake (Luke 21:17). And when Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (John 12:32), He certainly did not mean that every individual of mankind would be so drawn. What He did mean was that Jews and Gentiles, men of all nations and races, would be drawn to Him. And that is what we see is actually happening.

In I Cor. 15:22 we read, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." This verse is often quoted by Arminians to prove unlimited or universal atonement. This verse is from Paul's famous resurrection chapter, and the context makes it clear that he is not talking about life in this age, whether physical or spiritual, but about the resurrection life. Christ is the first to enter the resurrection life, then, when He comes, His people also enter into their resurrection life. And what Paul says is that at that time a glorious resurrection life will become a reality, not for all mankind, but for all those who are in Christ. And this point is illustrated by the well known fact that the race fell in Adam, who acted as its federal head and representative. What Paul says in effect this: "For as all born in Adam die, so also all born again in Christ shall be made alive." Verse 22, therefore, refers not to something past, nor to something present, but to something future; and it has no special bearing at all on the Calvinistic-Arminian controversy.

Two other verses that also are often quoted in defense of Arminianism are "Behold, I stand at the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20); and "...he that will [KJV, whosoever will], let him take the water of life freely" (Rev.

22:17). This general invitation is extended to all men. It may be, and often is, the means that the Holy Spirit uses to arouse in certain individuals the desire for salvation as He puts forth His supernatural power to regenerate them. But these verses, taken by themselves, fail to take into consideration the truth that already has been stressed in this article, that fallen man is spiritually dead, and that as such he is as totally unable to respond to the invitation as are the fallen angels or demons. Fallen man is as dead spiritually as Lazarus was dead physically until Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth," and the Pharisee Nicodemus, "Except one be born anew [or, from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God"(John 3:3). And again, He said to the Pharisees, "why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word" (John 8:43). Apart from that divine assistance no one can hear the invitation or put forth the will to come to Christ.

The declaration that Christ died for "all" is made clearer by the song that the redeemed sing before the throne of the Lamb: "Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Oftentimes the word "all" must be understood to mean all the elect, all His Church, all those whom the Father has given to the Son, as when Christ says, "All that which the Father giveth me shall come to me" (John 6:37), but not all men universally and every man individually. The redeemed host will be made up of men from all classes and conditions of life, of princes and peasants, of rich and poor, bond and free, male and female, Jews and Gentiles, men of all nations and races. That is the true universalism of Scripture.

# The Two Systems Contrasted

We have said that Christianity comes to its fullest expression in the Reformed Faith. The great advantage of the Reformed Faith is that in the framework of the Five Points of Calvinism it sets forth clearly what the Bible teaches concerning the way of salvation. Only when these truths are seen as a unit and in relation to each other can one really understand or appreciate the Christian system in all of its strength and beauty.

The reason that so many Christians have only a weak faith, and that so many churches present only a rather superficial form of Christianity, is that they never really see the system in its logical consistency. It is not enough for the professing Christian to know that God loves him and that his sins have been forgiven. He should know how and why his redemption has been accomplished and how it has been made effective. And that is set forth systematically in the Five Points of Calvinism.

Historically, the Five Points of Calvinism have been held by the Presbyterian and Reformed churches and by many Baptists, while the substance of the Five Points of Arminianism has been held by the Methodist and Lutheran churches and also by many Baptists.

The Five Points of Calvinism may be more easily remembered if they are associated with the word T-U-L-I-P:

T - Total Inability

U - Unconditional Election

L - Limited Atonement

I - Irresistible (Efficacious) Grace

P - Perseverance of the Saints

The following material, taken from Romans: an Interpretive outline, by David N. Steele and Curtis Thomas, Baptist ministers in Little Rock, Arkansas, contrasts the Five Points of Calvinism with the Five Points of Arminianism in the clearest and most concise form that we have found anywhere. It is also included as an Appendix in The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, by the present writer. Each of these books is published by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Phillipsburg, N.J.

## **THE "FIVE POINTS" OF ARMINIANISM**

### **1. Free-Will or Human Ability**

Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation.

### **2. Conditional Election**

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was

determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. Thus the sinner's choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

### 3. Universal Redemption or General Atonement

Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.

### 4. The Holy Spirit Can Be Effectually Resisted

The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) proceeds and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man.

## 5. Falling from Grace

Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc.

All Arminians have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ - that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.

According to Arminianism:

Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God (who takes the initiative) and man (who must respond) - man's response being the determining factor. God has provided salvation for everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who, of their own free will, "choose" to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the crucial point, man's will plays a decisive role; thus man, not God, determines who will be recipients of the gift of salvation.

## **THE "FIVE POINTS" OF CALVINISM**

### 1. Total Inability or Total Depravity

Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not - indeed he cannot - choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ - it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to

salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation - it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God.

## 2. Unconditional Election

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response of obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

## 3. Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement

Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, therefore guaranteeing their salvation.

## 4. The Efficacious Call of the Spirit or Irresistible Grace

In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The

internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation by man's will, nor is He dependent upon man's cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.

## 5. Perseverance of the Saints

All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.

According to Calvinism:

Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the Triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.

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