

Arminianism vs Calvinism

By Archie Miller



Calvinism is the theology of an attorney who was influenced by Martin Luther to reject his Roman Catholicism. John Calvin (1509-1564) developed a systematic theology that became the under-girding of numerous religious groups, including all those who refer to themselves as "reformed." Calvin was the second most important leader of the Reformation.

Arminianism was started by Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). He was born slightly before John Calvin died and was actually taught by Calvin's son-in-law. He was a Calvinist until one day when forced to defend his beliefs and found that his opponent could more ably defend his views against Calvinism. This caused Arminius to rethink his theology and ultimately reject his Calvinistic background and "sought to modify Calvinism so that 'God might not be considered the author of sin, nor man an automation in the hands of God.'"



Free Will vs Determinism

This has been a debate for four centuries and I can in no way be considered the authority on the subject, so I will limit my discussion to the arguments used for each point. I will offer as a disclaimer that I do lean to the Arminian side.

The clash between these two views comes down to a matter of free will and whether we have any at all as compared to what God wills. Some will say that God will override human will in all cases if God wills something different. Others say that God gave humans free will and because he created humans with free will, he will not override. Finally, there are some who do not believe humans have free will and that the sovereignty of God causes everything to happen.

There are five points of Calvinism and five points of Arminianism, and they are usually designated with the acronym *TULIP*. This brief paper will contrast these five points.

T

(C) Total Depravity vs. (A) Natural Ability

Total depravity is explained by quoting Romans in saying, “no one seeks God, no not one.” Because of an inherent sinful nature, man can not and does not search for God and never will.

Natural ability is not the idea that man can save himself but rather once prodded by the Holy Spirit a person may choose Christ. Man, while flawed, is not so bad that he will never look to God on his own.

U

(C) Unconditional Election vs. (A) Election based on (fore)knowledge

In **Unconditional Election**, God hand selects who is going to be saved. No matter what a person may have to say about it, God is going to save them despite themselves. Good examples of this are Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians and the Apostle Paul. Both were in the business of persecuting the people of God. Nebuchadnezzar spent seven years as a madman before turning to the Lord while Paul was blinded on the road to Damascus.

Election based on (fore)knowledge acknowledges that the Bible speaks of people being elect. The argument is made that God knew how a person would react to the gospel before it was ever presented to them. It is not a matter of God forcing His will on anyone, but rather God knew they would become saved and God chose them because of that. Despite Paul’s free will seeming to be violated, it could be argued that God knew Paul would become a Christian and thus elected him and never forced anything upon him.

L

(C) Limited Atonement vs. (A) Unlimited Atonement

In **limited atonement**, Christ died only for the elect. If he died for those who were not elect, his blood was either wasted or it would have overridden the will of the non elect and they too would have been saved. This is the point which some Calvinists stumble. Some willingly accept the other four points of Calvinism but believe in unlimited atonement. They are dubbed by some as “four point Calvinists.”

Unlimited atonement is much easier to explain and to believe. Christ died for the world. “For God so loved the world...” To not believe in unlimited atonement means that inclusive words such as “world” or “all” only refer to all the elect. While this has been argued, it seems a stretch under the original meaning of such texts.

I

(C) Irresistible Grace vs. (A) Prevenient Grace

Irresistible grace is the concept that when God extends grace to a person, they have no will to reject it. Just as in the case of unconditional election, the person has no choice over the matter.

Prevenient grace is grace that is extended to a believer before salvation. It is a matter of God opening the doors to heaven and a person choosing for themselves to walk through. But just because the door is open does not mean the person will walk through it. The person still has free will, this grace allows the person to choose God that would otherwise be unable to do so.

P

(C) Perseverance of the Saints vs. (A) Conditional Perseverance

Perseverance of the Saints is the idea that once a person is saved, they are always saved. Because God has elected them and they had no choice in the matter, no one has any choice in the matter of becoming “unsaved.” Proponents cite that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit upon salvation and that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Conditional Perseverance believes that salvation is dependent upon faith. If a person stops believing in Jesus to take away their sins, they are no longer saved. Those who believe in once saved always saved will say that a person would not stop believing in Jesus once they are saved and the situation is merely hypothetical. Believers in conditional perseverance cite that ongoing belief is required in the Bible. Even John 3:16 says “anyone who believes” not believed at one time, but is in the act of believing. Numerous epistles in the New Testament also exhort people to overcome and promise eternal life to those who do so. If overcoming was guaranteed upon salvation, the exhortation would be foolish.

NOTES