

Chapter 15

The Dirty Dozen: 2

Arminianism

DENNIS A. WRIGHT, DMIN

1



Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out ... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:35-37, 44



On January 15, 1865, while preaching at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Charles Haddon Spurgeon declared, "I believe that very much of current Arminianism is simply ignorance of gospel doctrine; and if people began to study their Bibles, and to take the Word of God as they find it, they must inevitably, if believers, rise up to rejoice in the doctrines of grace."¹ With that statement, I believe Spurgeon nailed it!



The vast majority of Christians today are what we call semi-Pelagian in their theology. They read the statement of Jesus this way: "All who come to Me the Father will give to Me." That's Arminianism.

R. C. Sproul²



¹ Spurgeon, C. H. (1865). "Knowledge Commended." In *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 11:29.

² Sproul, R.C. (2019). *John: An Expositional Commentary*. Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 113-119.

THE ARMINIAN TRADITION

J.I. Packer writes, “Whereas Calvinism often refers to the theology of John Calvin, the same cannot be said of Arminianism that takes its name from James Arminius (1560–1609), an Amsterdam clergyman and pupil of Theodore Beza, Calvin’s successor in Geneva, whose studies led him first from supralapsarianism³ to infralapsarianism⁴ and then to settle for a position like that of Melanchthon and Nicholas Hem(m)ingius, Lutheran professor of theology at Copenhagen and once Melanchthon’s student—namely, conditional predestination of individuals based on a synergistic view of how, through grace, men have faith.⁵

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“Arminianism” today tends to refer to a spectrum of positions that differ from Calvinism on issues of freedom, predestination and election. However, it is worth briefly noting the historical roots of Arminianism. Packer writes:

Historically, Arminianism has appeared as a reaction against the Calvinism of Beza and the Synod of Dort, affirming in the words of W.R. Bagnell, “conditional in opposition to absolute predestination, and general in opposition to particular redemption” ... Arminianism was born in Holland at the turn of the seventeenth century, and synodically condemned by the whole Reformed world at Dort in 1619. In England, an Arminian tradition of teaching lasted into, and right through, the eighteenth century. Arminianism was part of the Wesley family heritage, and John and Charles fought the Calvinists by prose and poetry throughout their evangelical ministry. The Arminian evangelical tradition has been maintained by Methodists and others up to the present day.⁶

In 1610 a group of Arminius’ followers published a *Remonstrance* which has become known as the “five points” of Arminianism and to which the Synod of Dort responded shortly afterwards in 1618. So, for Arminians:

³ Supralapsarianism (also called *antelapsarianism*, *pre-lapsarianism* or *prelapsarianism*) is the view that God’s decrees of election and reprobation logically *preceded* the decree of the fall of man. (Cross, Frank; Livingston, Elizabeth, eds. (2005), “Sublapsarianism”, *The Oxford Dictionary Of The Christian Church*, New York: Oxford University Press).

⁴ Infralapsarianism (also called *postlapsarianism* and *sublapsarianism*) asserts that God’s decrees of election and reprobation logically *succeeded* the decree of the Fall. (Cross & Livingston).

⁵ Packer, J.I. (1985). ‘Arminianisms’ in eds. Godfrey and Boyd, *Through Christ’s Word: A Festschrift for P.E. Hughes*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 128 n.10.

⁶ Packer (1985), ‘Arminianisms,’ 122, 124. The quotation by W.R. Bagnell comes from *The Writings of Arminius* tr. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnell (Grand Rapids, 1956), I:iii.

- (1) Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the gospel when it is put before him, nor
- (2) is ever so completely controlled by God that he cannot reject it.
- (3) God's election of those who shall be saved is prompted by His foreseeing that they will of their own accord believe.
- (4) Christ's death did not ensure the salvation of anyone, for it did not secure the gift of faith to anyone (there is no such gift): what it did was rather create a possibility for everyone if they believe.
- (5) It rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace by keeping up their faith; those who fail here fall away and are lost.⁷

Again, such views are but one small part of a wider theological perspective. In very broad terms, Arminians believe—*incorrectly!*—that human responsibility and accountability entail a “libertarian” view of human freedom and that God cannot cause human decisions: “Therefore they conclude that God’s providential involvement in or control of history must *not* include *every specific detail* of every event that happens, but that God instead simply *responds* to human choices and actions as they come about and does so in such a way that his purposes are ultimately accomplished in the world.”⁸ Daniel Strange⁹ references a “collection of essays by evangelical ‘Arminian’ writers which promote Arminian theology over and against Calvinism.”¹⁰ (*The reader is encouraged to be a Berean at this point!*)

⁷ Packer, J.I. (1983). “Introductory Essay” to John Owen (1648). *Death of Death in the Death of Christ: A Treatise in Which the Whole Controversy about Universal Redemption is Fully Discussed*, 1–25. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 4.

⁸ Grudem, W. (1994). *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 338.

⁹ Strange, D. (2002). *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised: An Analysis of Inclusivism in Recent Evangelical Theology*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 10-11.

¹⁰ Two recent collections of essays by evangelical “Arminian” writers which promote Arminian theology over and against Calvinism are Clark H. Pinnock, editor, *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis, 1975); and editor Clark H. Pinnock, *The Grace of God and the Will of Man. A Case for Arminianism* (Minneapolis, 1995). For an historical account of Arminianism (although from a critical perspective) see Packer, “Introductory Essay” to John Owen’s, *Death of Death in the Death of Christ: A Treatise in Which the Whole Controversy about Universal Redemption is Fully Discussed* (1648), 1–25. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983; Packer (1985) ‘Arminianisms,’ 121–148; Muller, Richard (1995). “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius’ Gambit and the Reformed Response” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*. Vol. 2. eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 251-279. Again Grudem is helpful in his bibliographical lists. Those evangelicals who fall under

EXCURSUS:
IS ARMINIANISM EVANGELICAL OR AN ENEMY?
CURT DANIEL

The question that orthodox Calvinists must answer is: Are Arminians true Christians or heretics? Is Arminianism *ipso facto* damnable heresy regardless of whether it is moderate or extreme, or is it a tolerable error that still holds to the true gospel? Most Hyper-Calvinists insist that all Arminians are heretics and in the same damnable class as the cults, Roman Catholics, and Protestant liberals. Mainline Calvinists, however, are not so critical in their estimation.

Iain Murray speaks for many: “[A] person does not have to be a Calvinist to be a Christian. An evangelist of Arminian persuasion preaches the same Saviour as the Calvinist.”¹¹ He thus agrees with John Newton and Charles Spurgeon.¹² George Whitefield the Calvinist strongly disagreed with John Wesley the Arminian and ceased working with him but still considered him a revered brother in Christ and effective preacher of the gospel. Spurgeon admired D. L. Moody. Many Calvinists such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones respected Billy Graham, *his altar calls and ecumenism notwithstanding*.¹³

By contrast, some extreme Arminians deny that Calvinists are Christians. Lawrence Vance appears to hold this opinion when he wrote “Calvinism is the greatest ‘Christian’ heresy that has ever plagued the church.”¹⁴ Greater than Arianism? Or Pelagianism? Or Catholicism or Mormonism? Perhaps he exaggerates. But many if not most Hyper-Calvinists reply in kind by claiming that anyone who denies any of the five points is not a true Christian. Mainstream Calvinists would calmly remind them that however important the five points are, they are not of the essence of the gospel as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 and elsewhere. Evangelical Arminians preach the same basic gospel as historic Calvinists. That does not, of course, apply to the more extreme Arminians who advocate liberalism, Socinianism, Open Theism, or other poisonous heresies and false gospels.

the “Arminian” category include: James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius* 3 Vols. (Grand Rapids, 1956); Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible says about God the Creator*, (Joplin, 1983); John Miley, *Systematic Theology* 2. Vols. (New York, 1892–94); Wiley H. Orton, *Christian Theology* 3 Vols. (Kansas City, 1940–43).

¹¹ Murray, Iain (2009). *Heroes*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 277.

¹² Murray (2009), 102–104.

¹³ Emphasis added!

¹⁴ Vance, Lawrence (1999). *The Other Side of Calvinism*, Rev. ed. Pensacola: Vance, x.

William Ames—Puritan, supralapsarian, and advisor at the Synod of Dort—perceptively observed:

The view of the Remonstrants (Arminians) as it is taken by the mass of their supporters, is not strictly a heresy, but a *dangerous error tending toward heresy*.¹⁵ As maintained by some of them, however, it is the Pelagian heresy: because they deny that the effective operation of inward grace is necessary for conversion.¹⁶

Extreme Arminianism is not evangelical. It goes beyond Semi-Pelagianism, adds merit to free will, and goes beyond mere synergism into a co-saviorhood with God or even a monergism of man. That clearly is a false gospel deserving damnation (Galatians 1:9). But evangelical Arminians usually condemn it as strongly as we do.

R. C. Sproul put it like this: “People often ask me if I believe Arminians are Christians. I usually answer, ‘Yes, barely.’ They are Christians by what we call a felicitous inconsistency.”¹⁷ Many Reformed leaders have respected Arminian leaders such as A. W. Tozer as spiritual giants. Iain Murray, cofounder of The Banner of Truth, wrote a sympathetic biography of John Wesley, which pointed out his numerous errors but also his godliness and orthodoxy on the gospel. Mainstream Calvinists accept evangelical Arminians as brothers. We hope they repay the compliment. Most do.¹⁸



I believe that very much of current Arminianism is simply ignorance of gospel doctrine; and if people began to study their Bibles, and to take the Word of God as they find it, they must inevitably, if believers, rise up to rejoice in the doctrines of grace.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon¹⁹



¹⁵ Emphasis added!

¹⁶ Quoted in Alan P. F. Sell (1983). *The Great Debate*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 23.

¹⁷ Sproul, R.C. (1997). *Willing to Believe*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 25.

¹⁸ Daniel, C. (2019). *The History and Theology of Calvinism*. Darlington, UK: EP Books, 709-711.

¹⁹ Spurgeon, C. H. (1865). “Knowledge Commended.” In *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 11:29.

PSEUDO-CALVINIST ARMINIANISM

Curt Daniel reminds us. “With the resurgence of Reformed theology in recent decades has come a backlash from other quarters, including Arminianism. Curiously, Lutherans and Catholics have not responded much to resurgent Calvinism.²⁰ The strongest attacks have come from fundamentalist Arminians. The more serious attempts at refuting Calvinism have come from Norman Geisler, I. Howard Marshall, Dave Hunt, Jack Cottrell, Lawrence Vance, Robert Shank, Robert Picirilli, F. Leroy Forlines, and especially Roger Olson. Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell’s *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* is friendlier than many others, as is *Whosoever Will*, edited by David Allen and Steve Lemke. Others are extreme, misinformed, and rude and should be distasteful even to other Arminians. Some rebuttals might be classified as Hyper-Arminian, the overreactive counterpart of Hyper-Calvinism.”

Daniel also states—and I believe accurately—that “Some anti-Calvinists like Clark Pinnock have drifted into Open Theism.²¹ Roger Olson has written extensively against

²⁰ Catholic works on predestination and grace sometimes disagree with Calvinism, such as John Cowburn, *Free Will: Predestination and Determinism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008); John Salga, *The Mystery of Predestination* (Charlotte: TAN Books, 2010); William G. Most, *Grace, Predestination, and the Salvific Will of God* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom, 1997); and especially Eduardo J. Echeverria, *Divine Election: A Catholic Orientation in Dogmatic and Ecumenical Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

²¹ “Open theism,” also known as “openness theology” and the “openness of God,” is an attempt to explain the foreknowledge of God in relationship to the free will of man. The argument of open theism is essentially this: human beings are truly free; if God absolutely knew the future, human beings could not truly be free. Therefore, God does not know absolutely everything about the future. Open theism holds that the future is not knowable. Therefore, God knows everything that can be known, but He does not know the future.

Open theism bases these beliefs on Scripture passages which describe God “changing His mind” or “being surprised” or “seeming to gain knowledge” (Genesis 6:6; 22:12; Exodus 32:14; Jonah 3:10). In light of the many other Scriptures that declare God’s knowledge of the future, these Scriptures should be understood as God describing Himself in ways that we can understand. God knows what our actions and decisions will be, but He “changes His mind” in regard to His actions based on our actions. God’s disappointment at the wickedness of humanity does not mean He was not aware it would occur. In contradiction to open theism, Psalm 139:4, 16 state, “Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD ... All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” How could God predict intricate details in the Old Testament about Jesus Christ if He does not know the future? How could God in any manner guarantee our eternal salvation if He does not know what the future holds?

Ultimately, open theism fails in that it attempts to explain the unexplainable—the relationship between God’s foreknowledge and mankind’s free will. Just as extreme forms of Calvinism fail in that they make human beings nothing more than pre-programmed robots, so open theism fails in that it rejects God’s true omniscience and sovereignty. God must be understood through faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6a). Open theism is, therefore, not scriptural. It is simply another

Calvinism and admits to holding to 'evangelical synergism.'²² He rightly points out the differences between the evangelical Arminianism of Arminius and Wesley as opposed to the more extreme Arminianism of Limborch and others. He claims to respect Calvin and Calvinism but pulls no punches in his severest criticism: 'What I mean is that if I were a Calvinist and believed what these people teach, I would have difficulty telling the difference between God and Satan.'²³ He admits leaning toward Open Theism and may one day fully embrace it.²⁴ This proves our point.



"C. Gordon Olson, not to be confused with Roger Olson, is typical of another kind of anti-Calvinist Arminianism. In *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*, he proposes a truce and a middle way that is neither Reformed nor Arminian. His 'inductive exegetical' approach appears to be critical and fair but usually results in the same conclusions as historic Arminianism. This is typical of other writers such as Samuel Fisk. Some claim to be neither, while others claim to be both: thus, 'Calminianism.' That is not Amyraldism²⁵ or even Baxterianism²⁶ but yet another form of Arminianism."²⁷

way for finite man to try to understand an infinite God. Open theism should be rejected by followers of Christ. While open theism is an explanation for the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human free will, it is not the biblical explanation. © Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered. Logos Bible Software.

²² Roger Olson (2006). *Arminian Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 18.

²³ Roger Olson (2001). *Against Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 23. John Wesley is reputed to have said to Augustus Toplady, "Your God is my Devil."

²⁴ "I consider Open Theism a legitimate and Arminian option even though I have not yet adopted it as my own perspective." Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 198.

²⁵ Amyraldism is the belief that God decreed Christ's atonement, prior to his decree of election, for all alike if they believe, but he then elected those whom he will bring to faith in Christ, seeing that none would believe on their own, and thereby preserving the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election. The efficacy of the atonement remains limited to those who believe. This doctrine is named after its formulator, Moses Amyraut, and is viewed as a variety of Calvinism in that it maintains the particularity of sovereign grace in the application of the atonement. However, detractors such as B.B. Warfield have termed it "an inconsistent and therefore unstable form of Calvinism." Amyraut additionally proposed an alternative view to covenant theology in which the Mosaic covenant was seen as neither a covenant of grace nor one of works, but rather as a third substance, being a subservient covenant.

²⁶ Some consider Richard Baxter's blend of Calvinism, Arminianism, and Lutheranism to be a kind of "Calminianism." But he denies being Arminian and is closer to Reformed theology than to Arminianism. Amyraldism is also not, as some think, simply "Arminianism in disguise." Amyraut stringently denied being Arminian.

²⁷ Daniel (2019). *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, 708-709.

THE ARMINIAN PANDORA'S BOX

All sorts of theological errors have sprung from Arminianism, such as Pentecostalism. One case in point is Open Theism. Daniel is quite correct that “One cannot cross from Calvinism to Open Theism without first becoming Arminian.”²⁸

He then points out that “A more serious error incipient in Arminianism is its basic objection to point after point of Calvinism—namely, ‘That’s not fair!’ This is not a mere academic objection against absolute divine sovereignty but an immoral rebellion against God who is absolutely sovereign. Job learned the lesson and submitted (Job 42:2, 6). Oh, that our Arminian friends would do the same. We puny and depraved humans are in no place to question the ways of God. Such rebellion proves the Reformed doctrine of depravity and is the very essence of sin.”²⁹

FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DO HIS CROSS WORK?

Robert L. Reymond correctly points out that “Not only does the evangelical universalist relax the supernaturalistic principle that is the bedrock of Christian theism, but to be consistent he must also reject the substitutionary character of Christ’s atoning death in favor of what he terms the governmental theory of the atonement.”³⁰ This necessarily follows from his recognition that if all that God did looking to the salvation of men he did for all men alike, and if Christ substitutionally atoned for all men’s sins (the doctrine of unlimited or indefinite atonement), then all men would be saved. Since, however, he recognizes that all men are in fact not saved, and since in his thinking no one must receive any benefit from Christ’s work that all others do not also receive (and those who are finally lost obviously do not receive salvation), he construes the cross work of Christ so that in itself it does not possess, nor was it intended to possess, the intrinsic efficacy

²⁸ This dangerous heresy became popular in the 1980s but is actually a reincarnation of sixteenth-century Socinianism. It came back when certain extreme Arminians such as Clark Pinnock violently reacted to the resurgence of Calvinism. Not satisfied with weakening divine sovereignty, they proceeded to deny divine omniscience—God does not know the future because the future is “open.” This obviously goes beyond the rejection of the all-encompassing decree in which God unchangeably foreordained all that comes to pass. To their credit, some evangelical Arminians such as Norman Geisler have opposed Open Theism. But the major opponents have been Reformed, such as Bruce Ware, John Frame, and Robert Morey.

²⁹ Daniel (2019). *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, 706.

³⁰ The governmental theory of the atonement denies that Christ’s death was intended to pay the penalty for sin (a penal substitution), but rather was simply a penal *example* of sin’s dreadful and tragic nature, so that divine pardon (“bypassing” the demand for the sinner’s punishment) could be issued without having the effect of weakening the honor or enforcement of God’s moral demands in the eyes of the public. The theory’s proponents contend that society would not take seriously the need to be morally governed by God unless in the place of punishing sinners God substituted some great measure which was unpleasant and filled with grief.

actually to save anyone. Accordingly, where there is still talk within the ranks of evangelical universalism of a substitutionary atonement in the sense that Christ's death paid the penalty for sin, it is—as Arminian theologian J. Kenneth Grider acknowledges in his article on 'Arminianism' in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*—a “spillover from Calvinism”:

A spillover from Calvinism into Arminianism has occurred in recent decades. Thus many Arminians whose theology is not very precise say that Christ paid the penalty for our sins. Yet such a view is foreign to Arminianism.... Arminians teach that what Christ did he did for every person; therefore, what he did could not have been to pay the penalty for sin, since no one would then ever go into eternal perdition. Arminianism teaches that Christ suffered for everyone so that the Father could forgive the ones who repent and believe; his death is such that all will see that forgiveness is costly and will strive to cease from anarchy in the world God governs.³¹

“This is the governmental theory of the atonement. Its germinal teachings are in Arminius, but it was his student, the lawyer-theologian Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), who delineated the view in his *De satisfactione Christi* (1617).”

Reymond continues, “Perhaps this is the place to respond to one reason which Grider offers for the Arminian view. He informs us that Arminians

feel that God the Father would not be forgiving us at all if his justice was satisfied by the real thing that justice needs: punishment. They understand that there can be only punishment or forgiveness, not both—realizing, e.g., that a child is either punished or forgiven, not forgiven after the punishment has been meted out.³²

“But such a view—construing punishment and forgiveness as it does as incompatible antitheses—simply fails to recognize that in all true forgiveness—human as well as divine—the offended party is vicariously bearing in himself the offense of and the punishment due to the offending party. To use Grider's illustration, when a parent truly forgives his repentant child and does not inflict judicial punishment upon him, what is taking place is this: the parent is vicariously bearing in himself both the child's offense against him and the punishment which the child's offense deserves, the parent's ‘vicarious sin bearing’ becoming precisely the ground upon which he may justly extend forgiveness to his child. Here punishment and forgiveness are both present; there is no incompatibility between them. Similarly, in the case of divine forgiveness, Christ—who

³¹ Grider, J. Kenneth (1984). “Arminianism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 80.

³² Grider (1984), 80.

was not a disinterested third party but as the Son of God was himself the offended party (along with the entire Godhead)—bore in himself both the offense and the punishment of those whom the Father gave to him, his ‘vicarious sin bearing’ becoming precisely the ground upon which the Godhead may justly extend forgiveness to those for whom Christ died.

“Also in response to Grider, if Christ’s death upon the cross was not intended as a sin offering to pay the penalty for anyone’s sin but was intended rather, by whatever emotive power it may assert, to illustrate to men what their sins penally deserve at the hands of a just God, then not only is no man’s sin atoned for yet but also Christ’s death is rendered useless, for it is simply not the case that sinful men conclude from his death that “forgiveness is costly” and that they should ‘strive to cease from anarchy in the world God governs.’”³³

EXCURSUS:
SALVATION IS OF US, NOT OF THE LORD:
SYNERGISM ROBS GOD OF HIS GLORY IN SALVATION
MATTHEW BARRETT, PhD

It is necessary at this point to outline several unbiblical consequences of a synergistic view. First, synergism means God is dependent upon man’s free will for his success in salvation. As Muller states, “In the Arminian view, the will is the effective ground of salvation.”³⁴ Muller’s assertion is demonstrated when Arminians like Pinnock write, “God makes the initial move by saying yes to us. Then it is our turn to respond with a yes or a no.”³⁵ Or as Wood says, man “has in himself the casting voice.”³⁶ *In other words, it is our answer, not God’s, which determines salvation.*³⁷

³³ Reymond, R. L. (1998). *A new systematic theology of the Christian faith*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 473-475.

³⁴ Muller, Richard (2004). “Synergismus,” in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 294.

³⁵ Pinnock, Clark H. (2006). “Divine Election as Corporate, Open, and Vocational,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 304; Also see Boettner, Loraine (1932). *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 175.

³⁶ Wood, A. Skevington (1999). “The Contribution of John Wesley’s Theology of Grace.” In *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 218. Also see Wesley, John (1978). “The General Spread of the Gospel.” in *The Works of John Wesley*. Edited by T. Jackson. 14 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker, 6:281.

³⁷ Emphasis added.



God makes the initial move by saying yes to us.
Then it is our turn to respond with a yes or a no.

Clark Pinnock³⁸



1. As Boettner observes, this means that “man proudly seizes the helm and proclaims himself the master of his destiny” and allows man to boast over those who are lost. “He can point the finger of scorn and say, ‘You had as good a chance as I had. I accepted and you rejected the offer.’”³⁹
2. Second, synergism means that God can be defeated in his saving purposes. God tries to save, but ultimately he is dependent upon man’s free will as to whether man will believe or not. How sobering this is when one realizes that, the majority of the time, God is thwarted and defeated in his saving purpose.
3. Third, if faith precedes regeneration, even if it be a faith enabled by prevenient grace,⁴⁰ then regeneration is not so much a sovereign act of grace as it is a reward for man’s cooperation.⁴¹

³⁸ Pinnock (2006). “Divine Election as Corporate, Open, and Vocational,” 304. **Pinnock is clearly wrong!**

³⁹ Boettner (1932), *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 175. Also see Turretin, Francis (1992-1997). *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Edited by James T. Dennison Jr. Translated by George Musgrave Giger. 3 vols. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2:553.

⁴⁰ Prevenient grace refers to the grace of God in a person's life that precedes conversion. The original expression (Latin: *gratia praeveniens*) means literally "grace that precedes". The English expression comes from an archaic usage of the word "prevenient" meaning "preceding." This concept has a similar meaning to the concepts of "vocation" or "calling."

There are variations in how prevenient grace is understood, particularly regarding God’s intent. In Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Arminian theology, prevenient grace is seen as a predisposing or enabling grace that assists all individuals in coming to faith. In Reformed theology, it is simultaneously comparable to two concepts: common grace which doesn't improve man's depraved unregenerate nature and has no salvific purpose, and effectual calling through which God calls to irresistibly believe.

When grace is considered with regard to its effects, prevenient grace is differentiated from subsequent grace. The nature of subsequent grace differs depending on the view on the deterministic or non-deterministic nature of the providence of God: John Wesley named two forms of subsequent grace : "justifying grace" (also called saving grace) and "sanctifying grace". Both of those subsequent forms of grace are resistible. On the contrary Calvinists have considered the justifying grace as an irresistible grace.

⁴¹ Sproul, R. C. (1997). *What Is Reformed Theology?* Grand Rapids: Baker, 187.

4. Fourth, and most importantly, synergism robs God of *all* of his glory in salvation, a natural consequent of points one, two, and three.

Arminians like Olson argue that their view does give God all the glory because it is God and not man who initiates salvation through prevenient grace.

Arminians point to a beggar who is on the verge of starvation and receives a gift of food or money that saves life. Can that person boast of accepting the life-saving gift? Hardly. So it is with salvation; even though the person being saved must freely accept and not reject grace, he or she has no ground for boasting because all of the ability came from God.⁴²

However, what Olson fails to recognize is that even if synergism is enabled by God's prevenient grace, the fact still remains that man, not God, is the determinative factor as to whether or not grace will be effective. As long as man determines God's success, there is grounding for man to boast. Stated otherwise, if Arminius and recent Arminians like Cottrell are right when they say that it is man, not God, who has the *final* say and determination in salvation, then God cannot receive all of the glory when a sinner believes.⁴³ Rather, man's will plays not a minor role but a *major* role in determining whether or not grace will be effective.⁴⁴ As Pinnock states, while God tries his hardest to "win our consent," the final decision and "right of refusal, he has vested in us."⁴⁵

Therefore, while God may initiate salvation, man ultimately receives credit in his own salvation because it is man's will, not God's, which makes the final choice. James M. Boice rightly concludes, "For Arminianism, human decision making holds a central place in salvation. This results in a theology that is not exclusively God-centered but is distorted in the direction of self."⁴⁶ Such a view robs God of his glory in salvation, providing a ground for man to boast. Sam Storms' words are sharp but accurate,

⁴² Olson, Roger E. (2008). "The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God." In *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: Four Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 168. Likewise see Wiley, H. Orton (1952). *Christian Theology*, 2 vols. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2:356. Oden, Thomas C. (1994). *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 269.

⁴³ Arminius, James (1956). "Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed," in *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 vols., trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (Reprint). Grand Rapids: Baker, 2:497.

⁴⁴ Ellis, E. Earle (2009). *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation*. New York: T&T Clark, 8.

⁴⁵ Pinnock, Clark (2001). *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 163. To see how such a view undermines our prayers in asking God to save the unconverted, see Storms, Samuel C. (2007). *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election*. Wheaton: Crossway, 206–211.

⁴⁶ Boice, James Montgomery, and Philip Graham Ryken (2002). *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel*. Wheaton: Crossway, 28.

Those who embrace the gospel would be deserving of some credit for finding within themselves what others do not find within themselves. Arminians object. They are quick to point out that if anyone does believe in the gospel it is only because of prevenient grace, something that they didn't deserve. Yes, but whereas it is *only* because of prevenient grace that they believe it is *ultimately* because of what they, as over against others, choose to do with the power God has thereby restored to them. Prevenient grace only makes saving faith possible. The individual himself makes saving faith actual. So we must still ask, "Who *ultimately* accounts for why one comes to faith and another does not?" In the Arminian system, the answer is the person himself, not God.⁴⁷

Likewise, G. C. Berkouwer exposes the man-centeredness of synergism,

In no form of synergism is it possible to escape the conclusion that man owes his salvation not solely to God but also to himself. Still more accurately, he may thank himself—by virtue of his decision to believe—that salvation actually and effectively becomes his in time and eternity. To be sure, synergism is constantly seeking to avoid this conclusion, and it is seldom expressed in so many words that salvation really depends partly on man. Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot in the long run be avoided and it is clear that we actually are confronted here with the real problem of synergism as it results in a certain amount of human self-conceit.⁴⁸

Berkouwer's point is that synergism inevitably makes salvation depend partly upon man, and the part that does depend upon man is the *most important* part, namely, the *final* part where man's will has the last stop en route to salvation or damnation. As Ware observes, in such a view "God does all that he can do, but the choice, in the end, *is up to us*." Therefore, man's will is "ultimately decisive in personal salvation" and thus "at its most crucial moment (the moment of belief or disbelief), salvation is *of us*, not of the Lord."⁴⁹

Ware's last sentence is the dividing line and the breaking point in the debate. As he explains, in the Arminian view it is man, not God, who is the person to credit in salvation. Therefore, while the Arminian may claim that in his system it is God and not man who saves, the Arminian still admits that whether or not man is saved is determined not by God but by man's free will. This, for the Calvinist, inevitably robs God of his glory and gives man something to boast about. The Arminian view could not be in more direct

⁴⁷ Storms (2007), *Chosen for Life*, 31.

⁴⁸ Berkouwer, G. C. (1960). *Divine Election*, trans. Hugo Bekker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 42.

⁴⁹ Ware, Bruce A. (2006). "Divine Election to Salvation." In *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand, 1–58. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 5. Emphasis added.

conflict with Paul when he says, “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Romans 9:16).⁵⁰ Indeed, for the Arminian, it does depend on human will and exertion!⁵¹

A FINAL THOUGHT

14

As we conclude this debate over the nature of divine grace, Herman Bavinck asks the most telling question of all, “One always has to face the question: at the end of all the interactions, who makes the final decision?” Bavinck’s answer to this central question is exactly what we have found to be true in the course of this project.

If it is the human person, then Pelagius is fundamentally correct and the decision concerning what is most important in human history—namely, eternal salvation—rests in human hands. If, however, the last word rests with God and his omnipotent grace, one sides with Augustine and accepts a preceding rebirth (internal grace) in which the human person is passive. In other words, by placing regeneration after faith and repentance, one does not escape the problem but wraps oneself in an insoluble contradiction.⁵²

Though Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism may differ, at the end of the day their answer to the question of who is the ultimate determiner in salvation is the same: man’s will decides. Therefore, J. I. Packer’s observation is invaluable:

Arminianism is a slippery slope, and it is always arbitrary where one stops on the slide down. All Arminianisms start from a rationalistic hermeneutic which reads into the Bible at every point the philosophic axiom that to be responsible before God man’s acts must be contingent in relation to him. All Arminianisms involve a rationalistic restriction of the sovereignty of God and the efficacy of the cross, a restriction which Scripture seems directly to contradict. All Arminianisms involve a measure of synergism, if not strong (God helps me to save myself) then weak (I help God to save me). All Arminianisms imply the non-necessity of hearing the gospel, inasmuch as they affirm that every man can be saved by responding to what he knows of God here and now.⁵³

⁵⁰ Boice and Ryken (2002), *The Doctrines of Grace*, 33.

⁵¹ Barrett, M. (2013). *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (1st ed.) Phillipsburg NJ: P&R Publishing, 376-280.

⁵² Bavinck, H. (2008). *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker, 4:66.

⁵³ Packer, J.I. (2005). “Arminianisms,” in *Puritan Papers*, vol. 5, 1968–1969, ed. J. I. Packer. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 27–30.

Packer's words are strong but true and sobering. When it comes to who has the final say, Calvinism answers that it is God and God alone while the Arminian answers that it must be man. As already seen, the former exalts and preserves the sovereignty of grace and the glory of God while the latter restricts divine sovereignty and steals God's glory, giving it to man instead. The former only boasts in the Lord while the latter gives man room, even if it be slight, to boast in himself. Bruce Ware explains the difference precisely:

But because "salvation is from the Lord" in every respect, from start to finish, and because to God alone belongs all glory and boasting for the gracious saving work he accomplishes and applies to sinners' lives (1 Cor. 1:26–31; Eph. 2:8–9), therefore the unconditional nature of God's election is highly valued by its advocates. Both the rightful glory of God and the proper humility of sinners are secured in salvation only when the work of salvation, from beginning to end, is grounded in God's unconditional elective purposes. With the psalmist, we proclaim, "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory" (Psalm 115:1 HCSB). Only if God's election of those whom he determines to save is grounded on the good pleasure of God and not at all on any quality, decision, or action that will one day be true of those persons whom God creates can we proclaim, without qualification, that salvation is altogether from the Lord, and to him alone belongs exclusive glory.⁵⁴

Ware's statement cannot be improved upon. Only when grace is unconditional, monergistic, and effectual, not only in election but also in special calling and regeneration, does God receive his rightful glory. Therefore, only the Calvinist can consistently say, "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory" (Psalm 115:1), and, "it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Romans 9:16). While the synergist comes to God with his own autonomy in hand, the monergist, as Augustus Montague Toplady once wrote, comes to God saying,

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy Cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Bruce A. Ware, B.A. (2006). "Divine Election to Salvation," in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 5–6.

⁵⁵ Barrett, M. (2013). *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (1st ed.). Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 315–317.

John R. de Witt is right on target when he states, “Arminianism essentially represents an attack upon the majesty of God, and puts in place of it the exaltation of man.”⁵⁶

SEVEN SIGNIFICANT SUMMARY STATEMENTS

16

1. **Calvinism vs. Arminianism:** Calvinism emphasizes God’s sovereignty in salvation, asserting that salvation is entirely God’s work, while Arminianism places significant emphasis on human free will, suggesting that man plays a decisive role in accepting or rejecting grace.
2. **Synergism vs. Monergism:** Synergism (Arminianism) involves cooperation between God and man in salvation, whereas monergism (Calvinism) teaches that salvation is solely the work of God, leaving no room for human boasting.
3. **Historical Roots of Arminianism:** Arminianism originated as a reaction to Calvinism in the early 17th century, with its foundational “five points” outlined in the Remonstrance of 1610 and condemned by the Synod of Dort in 1619.
4. **Criticism of Arminianism:** Calvinists argue that Arminianism undermines God’s sovereignty, robs Him of glory, and introduces human-centered theology, which can lead to theological errors like Open Theism.
5. **Evangelical Arminianism:** While mainstream Calvinists accept evangelical Arminians as fellow Christians, they criticize extreme forms of Arminianism that drift into heretical views such as Open Theism or Socinianism.
6. **Theological Consequences of Synergism:** Synergism implies that God is dependent on human free will for salvation, potentially leading to the idea that man, not God, is the ultimate determiner of salvation, which Calvinists view as an attack on God’s majesty.
7. **God’s Glory in Salvation:** Calvinism asserts that salvation is entirely God’s work, ensuring that He receives all the glory, as reflected in verses like Romans 9:16 and Psalm 115:1, while Arminianism is seen as diminishing this glory by attributing a decisive role to human will.

⁵⁶ de Witt, John R. (2000) “The Arminian Conflict,” in *Puritan Papers, 1668–1669*, ed. J. I. Packer. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 5:23. Likewise see J. I. Packer, “Arminianisms,” in *Puritan Papers*, 5:39; Michael Horton (2002). *Putting Amazing Back into Grace*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 126.

Ravenous Wolves: From Gnosticism to Narcissism



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