

A Simplified Explanation of the True Gospel

Why Arminianism is Unbiblical

Why is this important?

What is more important than the Gospel? Yet there are two versions of it in the church today (there are other minor variations but we don't need to look at them here). As these teachings are opposites, both cannot be right. One is called Arminianism, the other is called Calvinism (or Reformed Theology).

These names are not important and arise from Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), who is credited with founding Arminianism (though the ideas had been around a long time), and from John Calvin (1509-1564, though he merely restated historic Biblical truths).

If we preach a false Gospel we misrepresent God, produce sham disciples and build counterfeit churches. We can find that after years of service to God, we actually did no good at all if our Gospel is wrong. Only the truth sets people free.

Do you want to serve God truly, or waste your life?

Why write this paper?

Many people are put off by theological discussions. Some avoid theology because they disobediently refuse to study what the Bible teaches, even though they are able to. However, there are many sincere folk who just have great difficulty reading or following arguments; such as: children, older folk whose eyes are failing, people with reading or learning difficulties, those whose education was cut short, and many more.

Since this matter is important, I am seeking here to help these folk understand, as simply as possible, why it is vital to avoid Arminian presentations of the Gospel.

I will explain the problems of Arminianism step by step through the Biblical Gospel (which equates to Calvinism).

The Fall of Adam and Man's Wickedness

- Adam was created holy and in God's image - that is in righteousness, spirituality and immortality.
- But Adam was tempted by Satan and fell from holiness into sin. He thus lost the image of God. He became sin and lost all ability to please God. Indeed man became God's enemy.
- All mankind comes from Adam. This means that all men have Adam's weaknesses, sin and guilt. Adam stood for the whole race; when he fell and died, we all fell and died.
- It also means that no one can do any spiritual good, can only sin, cannot reach for God and can do no righteous or spiritual work.

- Thus no human being can have true faith or can repent and change their behaviour. No one can see God or hear his words. Everything man does is sinful; nothing is good.

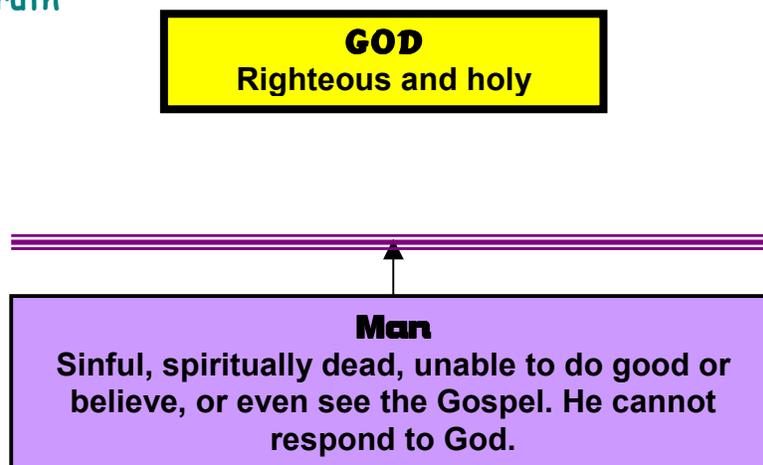
What does Arminianism teach?

1. Though fallen and polluted, man is not guilty because of Adam, men are guilty for their own sins.
2. Man can turn his will towards God and do good things.
3. Man can hear the Gospel, see the truth, and decide to obey it.
4. Men can come to God by choice.
5. Man can believe in Christ by choosing from free will, and then repent.
6. Man is weak because of sin but not dead.

What does the Bible teach?

1. Man is guilty in Adam (which is why men die) as well as for his own committed sins: The judgment *which came* from one *offence* [Adam's sin] *resulted* in condemnation. ... through one man's offence *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, (Rm 5:16, 18)
1. No man can do good: There is none who does good, no, not one. (Rm 3:12; Ps 14:3, 53:3)
2. No one can see the truth or hear the Gospel without God changing them first: Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' (Jn 3:3) 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And *theirsins* be forgiven them.' (Mk 4:12)
3. No man can come to God unless God calls him and empowers him: 'No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him ... Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.' (Jn 6:44, 65)
4. Faith and repentance are gifts given by God only to those he chooses (the elect): [God] opened the door of faith. (Acts 14:27) Those who had believed through grace. (Acts 18:27) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Eph 2:8-9) Him [Jesus] God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Saviour, to give repentance. (Acts 5:31) God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life. (Acts 11:18) God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth. (2 Tim 2:25) It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. (Rm 9:16)
5. Men are dead in sins, dead towards God, unable to do spiritual works: And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins. (Eph 2:1) And you, being dead in your trespasses. (Col 2:13) For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. (Jn 5:21)

The essential truth



Calvinists call this the doctrine of *Total Depravity*. It means that man is corrupted in every sphere of life and completely unable to exercise any ability to commune with God or successfully obey his law - in any way. It does not mean that every person is as evil as they could be; rather it means that every faculty of man is tainted; nothing in man is perfect. The Bible says that even man's normal daily work is still sin (Prov 21:4) and that our best righteous acts are filthy rags before God (Isa 64:6).

God's choosing of some people

- All men have gone astray, followed sin and the devil and are hell bent.
- God could justly have obliterated the world in condemnation.
- Instead, God chose to save a number of people out of this sinful world despite their rebellion against him. God's people are called - *the elect*.
- This choosing was done according to God's sovereign good pleasure and was not due to any good work the chosen person may do in the future. It occurred in eternity before the world was made.
- This choosing, called election, demonstrates God's love and mercy.
- The reaching out of God to chosen people is called grace (unmerited kindness).
- Those who are not chosen are left in their sins. They are called: *the reprobate*.

What does Arminianism teach?

God chooses according to what he foresees men will do in the future. So he chooses those who will have faith and repent by free will. His choosing is dependent upon men.

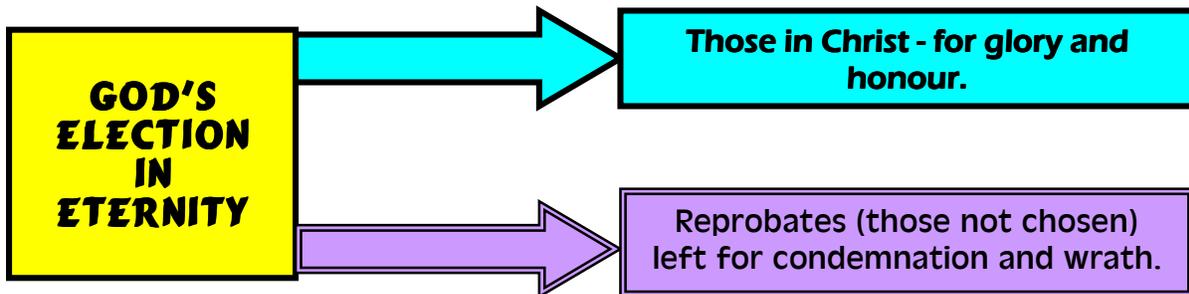
What does the Bible teach?

- It is God's choosing that causes men to approach him [not man's approaching that causes him to choose]: **Blessed is the man you choose, and cause to approach you, that he may dwell in Your courts.** (Ps 65:4)
- God's choosing (election) occurred in eternity: **God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.** (2 Thess 2:13)
- This choosing is based upon love and his own pleasure: **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.** (Eph 1:4-5)
- God's choosing is sovereign [i.e. it is absolute, unrestricted and not influenced by external things]: **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you ... I chose you out of the world.** (Jn 15:16, 19) **I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.** (Rm 9:15)
- God's choosing is not dependent upon man's work. His choosing in eternity results in grace to believe in time: **[God] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.** (2 Tim 1:9) Only those who are given faith can believe - God gives this faith to the elect alone.
- Those who are not chosen are left in their sin to be a testimony to God's justice and condemnation: **God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.** (Rm 9:22) **Certain men ... long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men.** (Jude 1:4) **They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.** (1 Pt 2:8) **The LORD has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.** (Prov 16:4) **men of corrupt minds, reprobate** [meaning: 'not approved',

‘disqualified’] concerning the faith. (2 Tim 3:8; KJV) God gave them over to a reprobate mind. (Rm 1:28; KJV)

- This means that God eternally loves some people and eternally hates others: As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’ (Rm 9:13) You hate all workers of iniquity. (Ps 5:5) The wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. (Ps 11:5)
- Those whom God foreknew are those whom God loved. He predestines to glory those he foreknew (loved): For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rm 8:28-29) [The word foreknew refers to a loving relationship, just as God knew Israel (Amos 3:2). He knew about every nation in terms of knowledge but only *knew* Israel in terms of love. Even people who prophesy in Jesus name, may not be ‘known’ or loved - Matt 7:22-23]
- The choosing is likened to a potter taking one lump of clay for an honourable use, and another for a dishonourable use. The lump discarded and not in the potter’s hands gets harder and harder: Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and another for dishonour? (Rm 9:21)

The essential truth



Calvinists call this the doctrine of *Unconditional Election*, that is, the decision of God to choose some people despite anything these people ever do for good or evil. He chooses, in love, according to his good pleasure.

The Death of Christ for these Chosen People Alone

- Salvation from sin is secured by appeasing God (pacifying or turning away God’s anger against our sin).
- This was done by the death of Christ on the cross; he died in our place. The result is forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Jesus only died for the people God chose.
- These people are called by various names: God’s people (not other people), God’s sheep (as opposed to goats), God’s flock (not other flocks), the remnant (not the whole), the elect (not the reprobate), the church (not other groups), God’s seed (not the seed of others), those people given to Christ (not other people).
- All Christians agree that the atonement (the payment for sin by Christ’s death) is limited since many people go to hell - not all are saved. The Bible teaches that it is limited in scope - Christ’s blood is restricted to those he definitely saves, the elect.
- Jesus intercedes for those he died for.

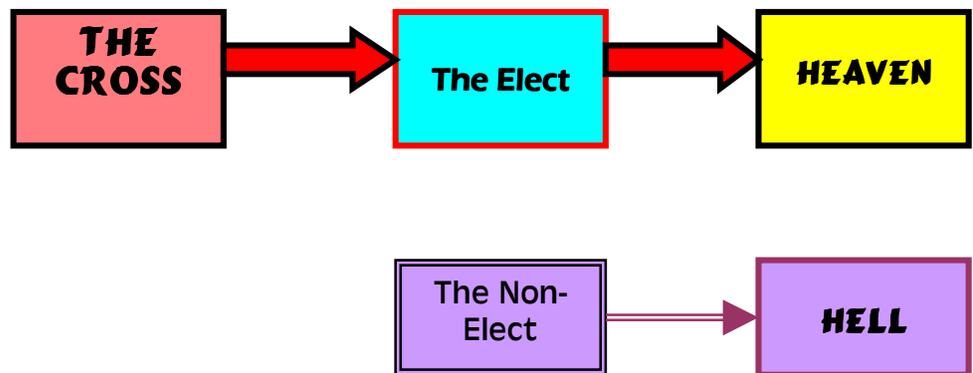
What does Arminianism teach?

1. Christ died for every person because God loves everyone. There is a universal salvation available equally for all to reach out and take by choice. Christ, therefore, dies for people who are not saved.
2. Christ's death is, therefore, limited in power. His death secures no one since salvation is dependent upon men believing or not believing. Salvation is merely a possibility for everyone.
3. If Christ died for everyone, then those in hell pay for sin twice, once in Christ and once in hell.

What does the Bible teach?

- Jesus death was selective i.e. for some but not all: you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins. (Matt 1:21) The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mt 20:28) The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. (Jn 10:11) All the flock ... which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28) Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. (Eph 5:25)
- Jesus' death definitely saves those he died for: He shall see *His* seed ... He shall see the labour of His soul, *and* be satisfied. ... my righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. (Isa 53:10-11) You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as you have given Him. (Jn 17:2) Father, I desire that they also whom you gave me may be with me where I am. (Jn 17:24)
- There is no atonement for some: 'Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you, even to your death,' says the Lord GOD of hosts. (Isa 22:14)
- Jesus only prays for his people, not everyone: 'I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours'. (Jn 17:9) He saves those he prays for.

The essential truth



This doctrine has various names in Reformed Theology. It has historically been called *Limited Atonement*, but this can sometimes be confused for suggesting that God's power is restricted (in fact it is the opposite, his power achieves its object). It is also called *Definite Atonement* since it saves those God intended; or *Particular Redemption* since God's redemption is particular (that is, for a singled out, particular, community of people).

God's power applied to his people alone

- Since God has chosen a certain people, and since Jesus has died only for those people, the Holy Spirit applies this salvation to those same people. Thus the whole Trinity works our salvation: the Father initiates it in eternity by choosing the elect; the Son accomplishes it at the cross by dying for the elect and the Spirit applies it in time to the elect.
- The Spirit does this by drawing God's chosen people to Christ, regenerating them (giving them a new nature, rebirth) and giving them the graces of faith and repentance.
- He does this using the means of the Gospel preaching of God's word. In the proclamation of the message there is a general call to all, but within this there is an effectual (powerful, accomplishing) call to the elect alone.
- The general call makes reprobates more hardened to the Gospel but empowers the elect.
- It empowers the elect by enlightening the understanding, convicting of sin and giving the will to turn to Christ.

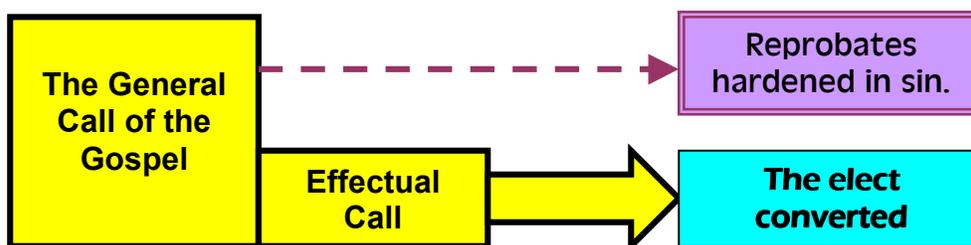
What does Arminianism teach?

1. There is a vague, universal, sufficient grace to help any sinner believe and repent if they choose to do so.
2. This grace can be resisted by those who reject Christ.
3. Anyone can choose to accept or reject the Gospel call by their free will.

What does the Bible teach?

- A *general call* goes out to all that can be resisted: You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. (Acts 7:51) I have called and you refused. (Prov 1:24) For many are called, but few *are* chosen. (Matt 22:14, 20:16)
- Only the elect hear the *effectual call*, which is irresistible: The sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (Jn 10:3) For the promise is to ... as many as the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:39) As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48) The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14) Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rm 8:30)
- The call that saves has nothing to do with man's works: [God] who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace. (2 Tim 1:9)
- The call of the Spirit is the drawing of men to Christ by God: No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. (Jn 6:44)

The essential truth



Calvinists call the power of God exerted to draw the elect, *Effectual Calling* or *Irresistible Grace*, both terms imply that God sovereignly brings his chosen people to faith and

repentance by his divine power. Conversion is not something initiated or achieved by man. It is something wholly undertaken by God who calls, empowers, regenerates, convicts of sin, gives faith and gives repentance (a changed life of obedience).

God's preservation of his chosen people to the end

- Those whom God has called and saved are kept by his sovereign power throughout the course of their life. They cannot continue in faith by their own strength, but God keeps them by his.
- Those who merely profess salvation but are not true believers will not be kept.
- Once converted, the saint has begun a process of glorification that is certain to be completed.
- This certainty rests on the truth that the believer has been united to Christ and sits with him legally righteous before God.
- This righteousness is the righteousness of Christ accounted to the believer.

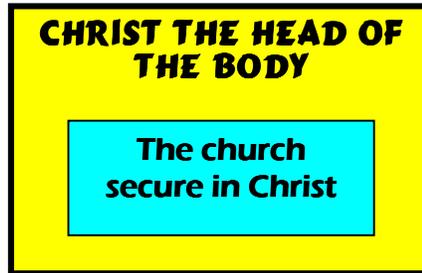
What does Arminianism teach?

One can never be certain of salvation. Christ's righteousness is not accounted to the believer. The believer must continue in faith and obedience by human strength. If he abandons the faith he will be eternally lost, despite being converted.

What does the Bible teach?

- God will not leave us: 'My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall my covenant of peace be removed,' says the LORD, who has mercy on you. (Isa 54:10) I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Heb 13:5)
- God will not stop loving us: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rm 8:35-39)
- God will not lose us: Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matt 18:14) I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given *them* to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of my Father's hand. (Jn 10:27-30) This is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all He has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (Jn 6:39-40)
- God will sustain us: [Jesus] will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 1:8)
- God guards us: [We] are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pt 1:5)
- We now have eternal life: he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. (Jn 5:24) For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rm 5:10)
- We are not condemned: *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rm 8:1)
- We are in Christ: For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Col 3:3-4)

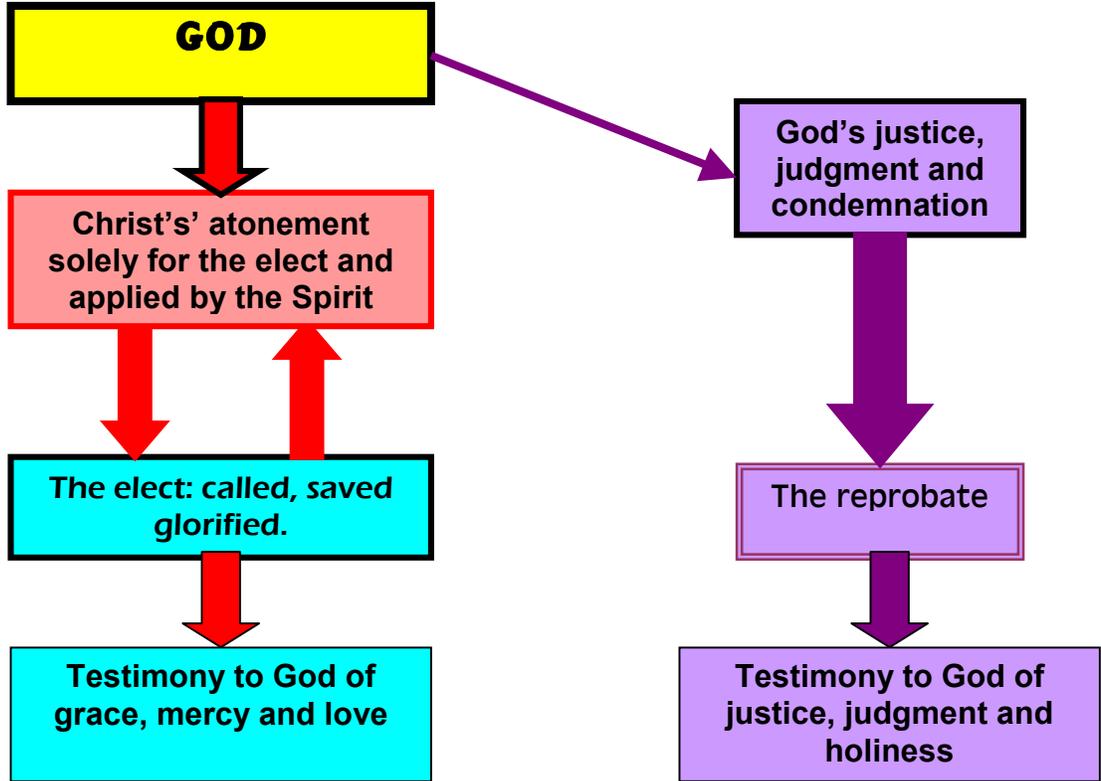
The essential truth



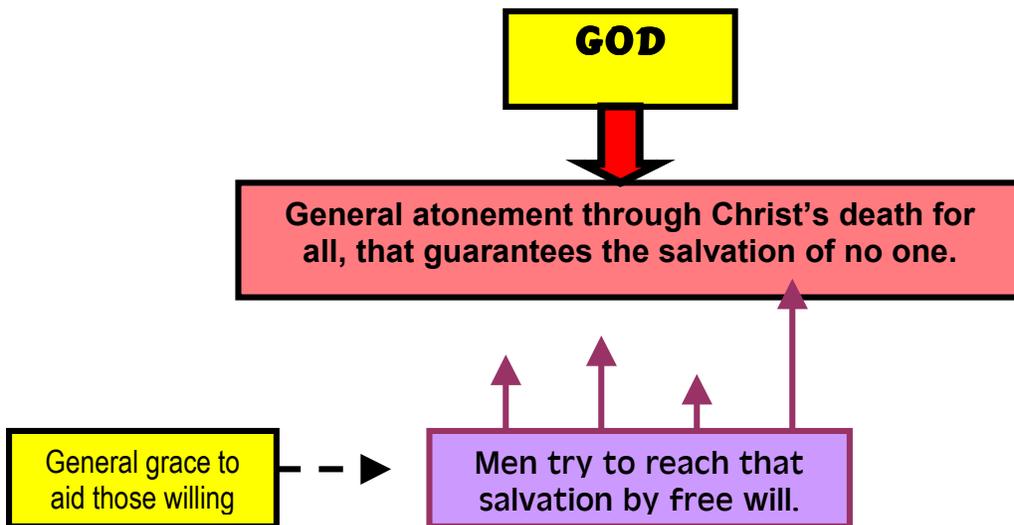
Calvinists call this doctrine by various names; such as: *the preservation of the saints*, *the perseverance of the saints* or *eternal security*. However, it must never lead to presumption or slackness. Believers are strongly exhorted to fulfil their calling and strive in faith. Indeed the Christian life is often called a battle or a race; it is not easy. We cannot sit back taking our eternal life for granted. Indeed, a mark of true faith is a constant striving to attain greater conformity to Christ and an increasing desire to serve him.

Overview of the systems

Calvinism: focus upon God



Arminianism: focus upon man



Conclusion

Is this system fair?

This is the accusation constantly thrown at Biblical Calvinism; but this is exactly the same position Paul had to defend. Read Romans 9 carefully; here he says that God is like a potter who can do what he wants with his clay. Some vessels are made for good use, some for bad; **Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens** (Rm 9:18). Some men are chosen to glorify God in his mercy, some are left in sin to show God's wrath and justice.

We must remember that all men deserve hell, no one deserves mercy at all. For God to give anyone grace is amazing since we all rejected him and rebelled against his will. The miracle is that God saves so many when he had no need to sacrifice his Son - he could have just wiped out the earth. But since man sinned, there had to be justice and condemnation for sin. God's holiness had to be satisfied against sin in the world. But in his great mercy, God also decided to save very many people to testify to his love and mercy.

Final word

I confess that I have failed to be as concise or simple as I hoped, but I have tried to explain these teachings in as clear a way as I can. I urge the reader to study these truths in their Bible and try to read more about them in books that explain the teachings.

I trust the reader can see that these issues are very serious and go to the heart of the Biblical Gospel. It is crucial that Christians understand these issues and hold Biblical truth firm in their heart. Anything less will ultimately cause a person to fall.

May God be glorified.

Suggestions for simple further reading

- Various articles are available from this author on all these subjects.
- *The Five Points of Calvinism*, William Parks; Berith Publications. [Highly recommended.]
- *The Five Points of Calvinism*, David N. Steele & Curtis C. Thomas; Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co.
- *The Reformed Faith*, Loraine Boettner; Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co. [Booklet]
- *The Five Points of Calvinism*, W J Seaton; Banner of Truth Trust, [Booklet]
- *Chosen For Good*, Lewis, Clements, Haslam; Kingsway Press.

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Contact

understandingministries@yahoo.com