

God Is Government

Isaiah 33:22

*“For the LORD is our judge, the
LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD
is our king; he will save us.”*



THE SOVEREIGNTY OF MANKIND

PART FOURTEEN

Most of the issues of understanding and allowing God’s sovereignty to work in our lives deals with our belief system. Two such systems that influence our lives today is Calvinism and Arminianism. The classic puzzle between predestination and free will is well documented as the controversy between these two systems. I want to spend this Part Thirteen and Part Fourteen to describe these two sets of belief that have so polarized the Christian community. We will discuss in this Part Arminianism.



The counterview to Calvinism is generally associated with Jacobus, or James, Arminius (1560-1609). Arminius was a Dutch theologian who lived about half a century after John Calvin. He started out as a strict Calvinist himself, but then later modified his views. His followers expounded on these in 1610 in The Five Articles of the Remonstrants.

Arminianism is the theological basis for the Methodist, Wesleyan, Nazarene, Pentecostal, Freewill Baptist, Holiness, and many charismatic churches. Arminianism has a comparable five points to those laid out in Calvinism, but without a convenient acronym:

Article 1 – Conditional Election

God is eternal, and He sees the end from the beginning. Those who are the “elect” are those God saw from eternity would respond to His Spirit and embrace the Gospel message. The elect are those God foreknew.

Article 2 – Unlimited Atonement

Jesus died for the sins of the entire world. His blood is sufficient to cover the sins of every human being who has lived since the beginning of time.

Article 3 – Deprivation

Man is in a fallen state, and he cannot desire anything good in himself. He has a free will, but it is not strong enough to choose God without God's grace in His life.

Article 4 – Prevenient Grace

Without the grace of God, no human can want or think good things or withstand temptation. All the good we do, or think is the result of our cooperating with God's grace and power working in us. However, God's will and Holy Spirit can be resisted. His grace can be ignored and pushed aside over and over until salvation is rejected forever.

Article 5 – Assurance and Security

A person is saved by Christ is protected and assisted and cannot be plucked from God's hand by tricks of Satan. However, by his own will man can fall from grace and turn his back on salvation.

Those who follow the teachings of Jacobus Arminius believe that God's election is based on His foreknowledge. He knew long in advance what choices we would make and which of us would respond to His grace. Arminianists reject the view that God elects anybody for Hell. While Arminianists agree that we are unable to do anything good without the grace of God working in us, they believe that we can reject God's grace and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Some Arminianists do not believe that we are totally depraved and condemned as a result of Adam's sin but are only guilty when we choose to sin voluntarily.

There is a lot of debate back and forth between the Calvinists and the Arminianists, and the net is that both have good points, and both have incorrect ideas. Calvinism emphasizes that God is in control of everything, and that nothing can happen that He does not plan or direct, including man's salvation. Arminianism teaches that man has a free will, and that God can never interrupt or take that free will away.

Philip Shaff summarized the situation well:

Calvinism emphasizes divine sovereignty and free grace; Arminianism emphasizes human responsibility. The one restricts the saving grace to the elect; the other extend it to all men on the condition of faith. Both are right in what they assert; both are wrong in what they deny. If one important truth is pressed to the

exclusion of another truth of equal importance, it becomes an error, and loses its hold upon the conscience. The Bible gives us a theology which is more human than Calvinism, and more divine than Arminianism, and more Christian than either of them.

Both doctrinal positions are reasonable and have extensive Scriptural support for what they assert, and teachers on both sides embrace the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. I could have taken each of the five points and barrage you with proof texts for the five points in each camp. We can almost hear the echoes of the verses we have heard so often on these ideas. Yet, most of these points are partly correct and yet partly overextended.

The concept of total depravity, the concept that we are all sinners and inherit that genetic defect from Adam, is Scriptural. However, the doctrine that Jesus died for our sins of the elect only is contrary to Biblical teachings. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus died for all sins, and that everyone is able to be saved if they will repent and turn to Christ. Limited atonement is not a Biblical doctrine.

The Calvinist view can give people the misconception that God graciously provided the elect with salvation. He appears unnecessarily stingy in a way that is not remotely biblical. God as an abundantly generous provider. More manna fell daily on the ground than what the Israelites needed. We know this because Exodus 16:21 explains that the manna melted in the hot sun after they had gathered it in the morning. God is not stingy. He does not need to limit the blood of Christ. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. Salvation is offered all. Whether people rejoice and embrace that gift is another matter.

I love what Wilbur Smith says about that: "I am glad He chose me back then because if He looked at me now, He might change His mind." Of course he is kidding, but nowhere in the Scripture does election get associated with damnation.

The Arminianist view can give people the misconception that we are all on our own. It can leave believers without a sense of their security as children of God. God certainly does have purposes and plans for us, things that He has created us to do. We are saved by grace and not our works, and yet God has prepared special jobs for each of us on this earth. We are all members of His orchestra, and He is the Director.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

- Ephesians 2:10

The Arminianist view can leave believers without a sense of God’s purpose and destiny in their lives.

The best way to resolve the issue is to read the entire Bible, to survey all the verses that touch on the matter. We cannot do that in this document, but it is clear that the Bible promotes both man’s responsibility and God’s power, grace, and constant work in the lives of those who serve Him. We see both working together.

Consider John 17, which appears to support the Calvinist view. Jesus is praying for His disciples, and He uses language that sounds like it would fit well with the points of Calvinism:

“Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: 2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.”

- John 17:1b-2

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”

- John 17:9

These verses certainly sound as though God has chosen those who are His, those who are saved. Yet even in John 17 we find verses that indicate that people of the world are free to believe or not believe:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;”

- John 17:20

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

- John 17:21

The Calvinistic idea that God predestines certain people to Hell broadly contradicts other verses, starting with one of the most famous verses in the Bible:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

- John 3:16

What does it say? God so loves the “world” – not just the “elect.” What else does it say? It says, “that whosoever believeth.” It does not say “those whom God chose” but “whosoever.” We find balancing verses throughout the Bible, verses that contribute to the entire picture. In the introduction of his Gospel, John offers a verse that provides us with both sides of the coin – those who believe, and God who gives life:

“12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

- John 1:12-13

In its extreme form, Calvinism denies man’s responsibility to seek God with all his heart. In its extreme form, Arminianism leads to the belief that if a believer sins, he has lost his salvation and he must be born again and again and again. The truth is a river that flows between these two extremes.

Of course, if we can accept God and reject Him of our own accord, can we lose our salvation? All of us have feared at times that we have gone beyond God’s forgiveness and might be doomed to Hell, but is that scriptural?