

A Brief Comparison of Calvinism and Arminianism

by Dean Harvey

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 or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual who 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 a 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 external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas 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 mans will, nor is He dependent upon mans cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. Gods 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 Christs 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.

REAFFIRMED by the Synod of Dort

This system of theology was reaffirmed by the Synod of Dort in 1619 as the doctrine of salvation contained in the Holy Scriptures. The system was at that time formulated into five points (in answer to the five points submitted by the Arminians) and has ever since been known as the five points of Calvinism.

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 mans freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Mans 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 Gods Spirit and be regenerated or resist Gods grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirits assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is mans act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinners gift to God; it is mans contribution to salvation.

2. Conditional Election

Gods 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 Mans 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 sinners choice of Christ, not Gods choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

3. Universal Redemption or General Atonement

Christs 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 anyones sins. Christs 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 Spirits call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is mans contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, mans free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christs 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. Gods 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) mans 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, mans will plays a decisive role; thus man, not God, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.

REJECTED by the Synod of Dort

This was the system of thought contained in the Remonstrance (though the five points were not originally arranged in this order). It was submitted by the Arminians to the Church of Holland in 1610 for adoption but was rejected by the Synod of Dort in 1619 on the ground that it was unscriptural.

THE FIVE ARTICLES OF THE REMONSTRANTS

Jacobus Arminius, Professor of Divinity in the University of Leyden, 1603, charged the Calvinist theory of predestination (incorporated in the Confessio Belgica) with making God the author of sin. His developed views on this point were very similar to those of the Council of Trent (The Roman Catholic counter reformation council held from 1545-1563). Though he did not deny election he based it not on a divine arbitrary decree, but upon Gods foreknowledge of mans merit. In 1618 these views, expressed in the Five Articles, were condemned by a synod at Dort, and the Remonstrants were compelled to leave the national Reformed Church.]

6. Conditional Election - corresponds to the 2nd of the five points

That God, by an eternal and unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundations of the world were laid, determined to save, out of the human race which had fallen into sin, in Christ, for Christs sake and through Christ, those who through the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe on the same his Son and shall through the same grace persevere in this same faith and obedience of faith even to the end; and on the other

hand to leave under sin and wrath the contumacious and unbelieving and to condemn them as aliens from Christ, according to the word of the Gospel in John 3:36, and other passages of Scripture.

7. Universal Redemption or General Atonement - corresponds to the 3rd of the five points

That, accordingly, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for all, by his death on the cross, reconciliation and remission of sins; yet so that no one is partaker of this remission except the believers (John 3:16; I John 2:2)

8. Free Will, or Human Ability - corresponds to the 1st of the five points.

That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the working of his own free-will, inasmuch as in his state of apostasy and sin he can for himself and by himself think nothing that is goodnothing, that is, truly good, such as saving faith is, above all else. But that it is necessary that by God, in Christ and through his Holy Spirit he be born again and renewed in understanding, affections and will and in all his faculties, that he may be able to understand, think, will and perform what is truly good, according to the Word of God. (John 15:5)

9. The Holy Spirit Can Be Effectually Resisted - corresponds to the 4th of the five points.

That this grace of God is the beginning, the progress and the end of all good; so that even the regenerate man can neither think, will nor effect any good, nor withstand any temptation to evil, without grace precedent (or prevenient), awakening, following and co-operating. So that all good deeds and all movements towards good that can be conceived in thought must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. But with respect to the mode of operation, grace is not irresistible; for it is written of many that they resisted the Holy Spirit. (Acts 7 and elsewhere passim)

10. Falling From Grace - corresponds to the 5th of the five points.

That those who are grafted into Christ by a true faith, and have thereby been made partakers of his life-giving Spirit, are abundantly endowed with power to strive against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh, and to win the victory; always, be it understood, with the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit, with Jesus Christ assisting them in all temptations, through his Spirit; stretching out his hand to them and (provided only that they are themselves prepared for the fight, that they entreat his aid and do not fail to help themselves) propping and upholding them so that by no guile or violence of Satan can they be led astray or plucked from Christs hands

(John 10:28). But for the question whether they are not able through sloth or negligence to forsake the beginning of their life in Christ, to embrace again this present world, to depart from the holy doctrine once delivered to them, to lose their good conscience and to neglect grace this must be the subject of more exact inquiry in the Holy Scriptures, before we can teach it with full confidence of our mind.

These Articles thus set out and delivered the Remonstrants deem agreeable to the word of God, suitable for edification and, on this subject, sufficient for salvation. So that it is not needful, and tends not to edification, to rise higher or to descend lower.