

The Great Debate

Calvinism vs. Arminianism

The History of the Debate

- The Early Church Fathers
- Augustine vs. Pelagius
- The Reformers
- The Synod of Dort

The Synod of Dort

- Jacob Arminius, professor of theology, the University of Leyden in Holland (1602-1609).
- In 1609, Arminius died.
- In 1610, his followers drew up "five articles of faith" based on what he had taught.
- A national synod was called to meet in Dort on November 13, 1618 to examine the views of Arminius.
- There were 84 Dutch delegates and 27 from various German states, Switzerland, England, and Scotland.
- After 154 sessions over 7 months, the synod reached a decision.
- They unanimously rejected Arminius' teaching.
- They also wrote a document that responded point by point to the five articles of Arminius—The Five Points of Calvinism.

The Chief Proponents

- Calvinism
 - Labels: Calvinism; Doctrines of Grace; Sovereign grace; Reformed
 - Men: Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Matthew Henry, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones.
 - Denominations/Groups: Presbyterians, Baptists, Bible Churches, etc.
- Arminianism
 - Labels: Arminian; Wesleyan; semi-pelagian
 - Key Men: Wesley
 - Denominations/Groups: Methodists, Baptists, Wesleyan, Pentecostals, Church of the Nazarene, etc.

The Crux of the Debate

- Who initiates salvation in the human heart?
 - Arminianism: "Man initiates; God responds."
 - Calvinism: "God initiates; man responds."
 - Rom. 8:29-30
- Who is sovereign over salvation?
 - God? Or man?
 - Has God done everything He can do to secure man's salvation and now He sits back hoping that man will choose Christ?
 - Or did God choose in eternity past who He would and does He in time, in spite of their depravity and inability, draw them to Christ?
 - John 6:44 – "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him."

The Crux of the Debate

- Who accomplishes regeneration?
 - Does God the Holy Spirit regenerate the sinner first, unaided by human effort or cooperation?
 - Monergism – *mono* = one; *ergon* = work; "one working."
 - Does man have to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to accomplish regeneration?
 - Synergism – *syn* = together; *ergon* = work; "working together."
 - Eph. 2:1-5

The Specific Issues in the Debate

A Summary

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T = Total Depravity ■ U = Unconditional Election ■ L = Limited Atonement ■ I = Irresistible Grace ■ P = Perseverance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Radical Depravity ■ Sovereign Grace ■ Definite Atonement ■ Effectual Grace ■ Perseverance |
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Human Ability Total Depravity

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Man is affected by the fall, but not helpless. ■ God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe. ■ Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. ■ Man's will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. ■ The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. ■ The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe. ■ Faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. ■ Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 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 in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not -- he cannot -- choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. ■ Consequently, the Spirit must make the sinner alive and give him a new nature, so he can believe. ■ Faith is not something man contributes to salvation; it 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. |
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Election Conditional Unconditional

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ God chose certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world. ■ 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 but resulted solely from man's will. ■ God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. ■ The sinner's choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ God chose certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world. ■ His choice 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 whom He selected. ■ 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. ■ God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation. |
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Atonement Universal Particular

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Christ's 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 in Him are saved. ■ His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. ■ Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 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. ■ 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, thereby guaranteeing their salvation. |
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Grace Resistible Effectual

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 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 Spirit's call. ■ The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. ■ Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. ■ God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 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; the internal call (which is made only to the elect) always results in conversion. ■ By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. ■ The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. ■ God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended. |
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Falling From Grace Perseverance

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 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. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All who were 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. |
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According to Arminianism:

- Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God and man -- man's 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, man's will plays a decisive role; thus man, not God, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.

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 Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the gospel. The entire process 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.

Which Does Our Church Believe?

- Our Elders unanimously agree ...
 - a) That God is sovereign in salvation.
 - b) That the issue of limited atonement or definite atonement will not become a divisive issue in this church.

Points of Agreement

- Not everyone will be saved.
- A free offer of the gospel can be made to all.
- Christ's substitutionary death is sufficient to save all men.

My Own Perspective

- Universal aspects of the atonement:
 - 1) common grace
 - 2) compassion
 - 3) admonition to repent
 - 4) the gospel invitation
- Definite: substitution
 - The issue is: what was the intended result in the mind of God?
 - Did Christ die as a substitute in the place of every unbeliever, even those who will end up being eternally condemned?
 - Did he pay for their sins fully upon the cross, forever satisfying the wrath of God against their sins.

Some Resources

- *Debating Calvinism* – James White & Dave Hunt
- *Chosen By God* – R. C. Sproul
- *The Five Points of Calvinism* – Steele & Thomas
- *The Doctrines of Grace* – James Montgomery Boice

The Implications

- Monergistic salvation exalts God's grace (Eph. 1:5-6)
- Monergistic salvation humbles us before God (1 Cor. 1:26-29)
- Monergistic salvation exalts God's glory (1 Cor. 1:30-31)

Charles Spurgeon

"It is no novelty, then, that I am preaching; no new doctrine. I love to proclaim these strong old doctrines, that are called by nickname, *Calvinism*, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus.

"By this truth I make a pilgrimage into the past, and as I go, I see father after father, confessor after confessor, martyr after martyr, standing up to shake hands with me.... Taking these things to be the standard of my faith, I see the land of the ancients peopled with my brethren; I behold multitudes who confess the same as I do, and acknowledge that this is the religion of God's own church."