

CALVINISM: *THE TRUTH*

Robert C. Harbach

About the Heritage Collection

The Heritage Collection consists of pamphlets on various subjects that were written by Protestant Reformed ministers from approximately the 1930s to the 1970s. At first they were printed and distributed as small plain covered pamphlets by the First Protestant Reformed Church Sunday School. Eventually, the printing was taken over by the church's evangelism society and their appearance was updated.

Background information on most of these pamphlets is sketchy. Some were written in response, occasionally fiery, to doctrinal struggles that took place at particular times. Often they were first delivered in lecture form and then printed to facilitate wider distribution. The earlier authors are in glory; the later ones are retired ministers.

Characteristics of the pamphlets are that they are solidly Reformed and Scripturally based – many abound in Scriptural proof texts – and, given the limited amount of space in pamphlets, provide a comprehensive overview and perspective on their topics. They are often not light reading, but taking the time to read them, study them, and savor the many insights they provide can be conducive to spiritual growth.

The writing of many of the pamphlets was sparked by debates decades ago, but the issues they address are still relevant for readers today. These issues always need to be clarified for those encountering the Christian faith for the first time and for each new generation of believers. Some of the more involved pamphlets may be of greatest benefit to believers who already have a background in the Scriptures.

It is our hope that these voices from a past era may continue to bless readers in the future as they have in many previous years.

Calvinism: the Truth

(Arminianism:the Lie)

Calvinism is a system of truth that emphasizes God's sovereignty or absolute control in man's salvation. Arminianism is a system that emphasizes man's will as being ultimately determinate in salvation. In this pamphlet, Robert C. Harbach contrasts the teachings of Calvinism and Arminianism in six areas and defends Calvinism as the truth of Scripture. Many Scripture passages are included and explained in the light of all Scripture.

Rev. Harbach indicates that some of the concepts presented here may be difficult to embrace because they are contrary to our own natural desires. May God give us the grace to submit to all of the teachings of His Word with contentment and give us comfort and joy in our salvation.

Rev. Harbach (1914-1996) served in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America as a minister of the gospel from 1955 to 1979.

This pamphlet is a 2011 reprint of the original work, with grammar and text slightly edited for easier reading.

CALVINISM...The Truth

Rev. Robert C. Harbach

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Introduction

Where there is access to a good theological library or to the old editions of worthy religious books, there are, in this anti-intellectual age, few professing Christians who avail themselves of the privilege of exploring the subject of “the sovereignty of God.” How few have ever read a book bearing such a title! One must make a rather exacting search to find material comprehensively treating the entire scope of this field—the whole counsel of God, the doctrine of predestination in its two parts: election and reprobation. For though “of making many books there is no end” (Ecclesiastes. 12:12), yet this truth is made gradually to disappear and at length be forgotten.

This is due to a determined decline from what is both Calvin’s and the Church’s Calvinism. This becomes evident when sovereign reprobation, if not expunged altogether from popular literature, is removed from its rightful place of prominence next and subordinate to election and is relegated to a mere footnote or appendix. Repugnant to “the flesh” (Galatians 5:17) it is, but it is no mere appendage to holy Scripture. It is an integral part of the

fundamental principle of that system of truth taught in the Bible and known as the Reformed faith.

In the interest of that faith it is much more than in good taste once again to place this gospel nicknamed “Calvinism” before the public. For the true church always fulfills its obligation to do so. The true church over against the false church is readily identified by its distinctive marks: the pure preaching of the Word of God, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the maintaining of good order in life and worship. Such a church is no hypocritical church. It stands, as the truth does, antithetically to the lie. The truth is, “our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased” (Psalm 115:3). The truth is God’s thesis. The truth is also God’s antithesis to the lie. Calvinism is the eternal truth. Arminianism has always been an inveterate lie. The motive, therefore, for publishing these fundamentals of faith is not, contrary to the spirit of the times, to secure premature “decisions” for or unintelligent acceptance of the Christian position. It is to proclaim the Word of truth, leaving conversion and salvation, which are impossible as well to the eloquent preacher as to the pleading evangelist, to the sovereign will of God and the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4–5).

Divine Sovereignty

ARMINIANISM is that rejected error that has become the most insidiously devised heresy ever to lay claim to biblical support. Its allure and popular appeal arise from its subtle flattery of depraved human nature and its apparent Scripture basis. In loud tones it pretends to the sovereignty of God. Arminianism claims that God sovereignly controls all creation, universal nature and the whole of mankind; His supremacy pertains to all things, everywhere. Nothing escapes His surveillance and all-pervading control. ‘The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good’ (Proverbs 15:3). It includes our lives; for ‘in Him we live.’ It embraces our actions, for ‘in Him we move.’ It extends to our very

being, for in Him ‘we have our being’ (Acts 17:28). We devise our own plan, but the Lord ‘directeth our steps’ (Proverbs 16:9). Yet His superintendency is so exercised that God is not the ordainer of sin, but only by His providence *permits* it. Neither does He coercively prevent it, and thus infringe upon man’s free will and responsibility. Indeed, in *that* providence God does not allow His sovereignty to interfere; for He has created and maintains man’s free will inviolate. Hence Joseph says of the crime of his wicked brethren, ‘But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive’ (Genesis 50:20). In the spiritual realm, God tenders His primary will that men be saved by obedience to the covenant of works (Genesis 3). When man broke that covenant, He, according to His ultimate will, employed an emergency plan—the Cross—that men be saved by compliance with the conditions: ‘except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish’ (Luke 13:3, 5). Here is the lie fostered that man takes central position at the hub of the universe. Man is almighty man!

CALVINISM has for its first principle, “In the beginning God!” He is the center of the universe. “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Romans 11:36). In the realm of creation, nature, and providence, absolutely nothing occurs without God’s appointment; but He works all things according to the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). Nothing happens by chance, but by the direction and ordination of our gracious heavenly Father. “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure:...yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isaiah 46:10–11).

Also God does more than merely to *permit* evil: He gives the power to perpetrate it: “Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11), for “power belongeth unto God” (Psalm 62:11). Further, He sovereignly determines beforehand that the evil shall be done according to His eternal counsel: “For of a truth against Thy holy

child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before ('foreordained,' ASV) to be done" (Acts 4:27 and the verses following). Though Joseph's brethren did wickedly sell him into Egypt, it is nevertheless true that it was not they but God who sent him there; for it was God who ordered their evil act (Genesis 45:8). The principle of Scripture is that evil rulers and their wicked actions come to pass by His ordination. "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men" (Daniel 4:17). "The powers that be," though the most degraded, "are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). The evil of war also is God's work: "For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favor, but that He might destroy them" (Joshua 11:20).

In fact, man acts only when activated by God. "In Him we live and move" (Acts 17:28). Literally we read, "In Him we live and are moved (Greek, passive). Consequently, we cannot turn to what is right unless God turns us. "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned" (Lamentations 5:21). A man's heart indeed does devise his way, but never independently of God's control, for his very thoughts and words come by the sovereign operation of God upon his heart. "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD" (Proverbs 16:1). "Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?" (Proverbs 20:24), that is, his own would-be autonomous way? God's will alone is absolutely free; and man's will is always subject to His. "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Daniel 4:35).

God is equally as sovereign in the field of grace. Here His mercy is free, never suspended upon conditions required beforehand, for

example, that man should repent or rightly use the light of nature. No unregenerate man can or does live up to the light of nature (Romans 1:20 and the verses following; 8:8); and repentance is a gift of free grace (2 Timothy 2:25; Acts 11:18). Finally, the saving death of Christ was designed chiefly for the praise and glory of God, not merely as a means to rescue souls from hell: “to the praise of the glory of His grace,” “that we should be to the praise of His glory,” and the whole of “redemption [is] unto the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). “Unto you [God’s elect people only]...a Saviour...[Why? Primarily for man’s betterment? No!] Glory to *God* in the highest!” (Luke 2:11, 14). The highest truth of Scripture is that God in His eternal purpose seeks His own glory. God is God!

Total Depravity

ARMINIANISM, however, under its breath croons the siren song of man’s essential goodness. Man is only “very far gone from original righteousness,” not really nor utterly dead in sin, nor destitute of all powers to spiritual good, but is wounded, badly corrupted, and left half dead (Luke 10:30). Though he be totally depraved, yet he remains a free moral agent, and he can still hunger and thirst after righteousness and life (Matthew 5:6); he can believe (Acts 16:31), if he will; he can will and choose, or not will and not choose Christ and all manner of good that may be offered to him: “How often would I have gathered thy children...and ye would not” (Matthew 23:37), and, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

Therefore the initial grace of God is not that almighty power whereby He raises us out of death into life, but is only a gentle advising whereby God does not produce the consent of man’s will, but merely proposes that consent to the will and leaves man to comply and convert himself: “Save *yourselves* from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). Man, therefore, after the Fall not only has power to do good, but can so resist God (Acts 7:51, but see this

under the “Irresistible Grace” section) that he can entirely prevent his (conditional) regeneration, since it is in his power to be regenerated or not. For before regenerating grace can work efficaciously in man’s new birth, the will of man must first move and determine to comply with the conditions of regeneration, for example: “I have set before you life and death...therefore choose life...” (Deuteronomy 30:19). To be sure, God must give the grace to conform to the prescribed prerequisites, as we ourselves can do nothing. Nevertheless, regeneration is a work of God in harmony with the free agency of man and performed on conditions required of man. “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12).

CALVINISM confesses the Scripture truth that man is *wholly* gone from original righteousness, that he has in his sinful flesh “no good thing” (Romans 7:18), and that “there is none righteous, no, not one” (3:10). Man, though physically (half or all) alive, is totally depraved, totally deprived of all spiritual ability, “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), and this death passed upon all men (Romans 5:12). “We had the sentence of death in ourselves” (2 Corinthians 1:9). Calvinism alone takes man’s spiritual death seriously. For man is dead, not merely half-dead; he is drowned, not simply drowning. By the Fall, man lost all power unto good, or to better himself. He is “wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge” (Jeremiah 4:22). He can do no good when it is his nature only and continually to do evil (Jeremiah 13:23).

Freedom of will for fallen man is the ability to act according to his nature. What is his nature? One totally corrupt, for “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the LORD search the heart” (Jeremiah 17:9–10). His “carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh [unregenerate nature] cannot please God” (Romans 8:7–8). This being true, unregenerate man cannot and will not believe...they *could not* believe. And we never will until we believe, “according to the working of his mighty power” (Ephesians 1:19); for we

“believe through grace” alone (Acts 18:27), that is, our believing is the result “of the operation of God” (Colossians 2:12). Why is this? Because faith is the gift of God, an exotic something, not something native to man. Not all men have faith: when Paul speaks of “they which *are* of faith” (Galatians 3:7), he implies that some are *not* of faith: “all men have not faith” (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Again, why? Faith is “the grace *given*” (Romans 12:3, 6), not to all, but it “was once *delivered* unto the *saints*” (Jude 3).

Furthermore, in regeneration and in the receiving of faith, man is passive, as an infant in physical birth (who has all done *to* it and *for* it—no cooperation!) and as in the initial work of salvation. Then it is not “save yourselves,” but as in the original, “Be saved” (aorist passive), and this indicates that God permanently makes alive the sinner dead in trespasses and sins. Then he acts and lives Godward. Thus the “receiving” and “believing” are acts of the regenerated who already “*were* born...of God” (John 1:12, 13), and so believed as *born* again and *because* regenerated. It is never true that one believes and so is for that regenerated; but one is regenerated so that he may and does believe: “he that heareth...and believeth...*hath* everlasting life” (5:24). *Why* he hears and believes is because he *hath* passed out of death, into life (Greek). He had to be in life before he could believe! For believing is evidence of regeneration.

The other texts Arminians appeal to under this heading must not be made to say what they do not say. First, the will of man can never disappoint or checkmate the will of God. Christ does not say, “I would have gathered you, and you would not.” Nor, “I would have gathered Jerusalem, and she would not.” Nor even, as some force the text to say, “I would have gathered thy children, and they would not.” But, “I would have gathered thy children, and *ye* would not.” That plainly does not teach that the children Christ would gather were unwilling to be gathered, but rather that the “generation of vipers” were not willing that they should (Matthew 23:13, 15)! Of the two wills here, the finite will of “ye would not” and the infinite “I would,” the latter never fails, and the former is

always subservient to the latter. Second, it is Arminian philosophy, not Scripture truth, that exhorts us to make a decision between Christ or some other alternative. Scripture allows no other: it is Christ or nothing! Moses does not bid us to choose either life *or* death. His precept is, choose *life!* This is further borne out by the fact that Joshua did not give sinful Israel a choice between Jehovah *and* idols. Instead, since it seemed evil to them to serve the Lord, preferring either the gods of their fathers “or the gods of the Amorites,” it was in severe denunciation (not “invitation”) that they heard, “Choose you this day whom ye *will* serve...but as for *me* and *my* house, we will serve the Lord...*Ye* cannot serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:14, 15, 19).

Unconditional Election

ARMINIANISM pretends to believe the doctrine of election. According to Arminianism, election is of such persons as believe and persevere in faith. For God has chosen the act of faith as a condition of salvation, which condition is a prerequisite unto the final establishment of man’s election: “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” are everywhere presented as the conditions. If then some men do not fulfill the conditions, they may possibly have an election unto faith, but not an election unto salvation. They may once have had faith, but unless they also fulfill the condition of perseverance, they at last are lost: “Lest...when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway [reprobated]” (1 Corinthians 9:27). Thus their election can be unto a justifying faith, without being a decisive election unto salvation. For it is necessary to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

God elects believers, it is contended, because He foresaw their faith, their holiness, their obedience and turning to Him in final perseverance. These good qualities, therefore, do not have their source in sovereign, immutable election; they are not fruits of election; nor is election the cause of all our fruitfulness; but the

performing of these as conditions are the cause of the election. Where we do read, “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48), we are to understand that it means, “as many as believed to eternal life were ordained.” Or if the familiar word order be retained, we are to understand “ordained” to mean “those who were ready” (Twentieth Century N.T.), or “those disposed,” that is, “those who felt led to exercise faith.” Arminianism takes the basic virtues of salvation and makes them previously necessary causes of election, foreseen as being fulfilled by the finally faithful.

CALVINISM maintains with Scripture that the Lord chose us not because we were holy, but “he hath chosen us in him...*that* [in order that] we should be holy” (Ephesians 1:4); not because He foresaw our obedience, but we are “elect...*unto* obedience” (1 Peter 1:2); nor because He foresaw our faith, for “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation *through*...belief” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). The effect of election is that none believe except those ordained *to* eternal life, chosen *to* faith and *to* every saving good. The word “ordained” pertains to the eternal, sovereign counsel of God. According to that counsel it means “to place”: “as many as were placed to eternal life believed,” that is, to be placed in such a way as to be rooted in and invested with eternal life; it means “to give”: “as many as were given to eternal life,” that is, those under the dominion and ownership of eternal life believed.

Since the word is a passive verb (“had been ordained”), it implies that a word omitted is to be understood. That word can be nothing else but “Lord,” which appears in the first part of the text. “As many as had been ordained”—by whom? By the Lord! It is not man’s act, but God’s. “I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen” (John 13:18), for “ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you” (15:16). Our election does not depend upon anything in us, but upon His own sovereign ordination. From God’s point of view, it is absolutely eternally firm and sure. Our diligence cannot make His decree any more

secure; it rather furnishes us with the comfort and joy that knowledge of election affords (1 Thessalonians 1:4).

God's election guarantees that none of His elect can be fatally deceived (Matthew 24:24); that none can perish (John 10:27 and following verses) or be lost (6:39). God Himself is omniscient, omnipotent, and never changes (Malachi 3:6). Therefore it is impossible that His election be changed, recalled, disturbed, or disannulled. Nor can the elect be cast away by God (Isaiah 41:9). They are cast away by men (John 6:37 with 9:34); and sometimes, because of their sins, they bring reproach upon the gospel and so are blamed and disapproved by men, enough, perhaps, to become useless in the Lord's service. But even if an elect person should have a fear that he may become a reprobate, still he is not, nor can he ever be. Scripture does not contradict itself (John 10:28, 35c). As to all God's people, *their* names were forever written in heaven (Luke 10:20), and He unconditionally promises that He will *not* blot out their name from that record (Revelation 3:5).

Reprobation

ARMINIANISM bitterly repudiates the doctrine of sovereign reprobation. It is this point that raises the most controversy and where we meet with the most serious and violent agitation. It is precisely at this point that the carnal mind has the greatest difficulty in submitting itself to the confines of the Word of God and bowing to the incomprehensible counsel of God.

When we ask, "What of the fact that there are certain angels and men who were *not* 'ordained to eternal life'?" the answer often given is that "God never sends anyone to hell, for His cross bars the way thence, so that the damned send themselves there, as a result of treading the cross underfoot (Hebrews 10:29). Indeed, for the sake of that cross God does not determine by an indisputable will to leave anyone in the Fall of man, or to pass by or leave anyone in the state of sin and condemnation. For 'God is not

willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (II Peter 3:9); [but see this under the Limited Atonement section.] Then it cannot be absolute predestination which determines the reason why God sends the gospel to one people and not to another, but rather because one is better and worthier than the other to whom the gospel is not sent: 'But seeing ye put it (the gospel) from you, and judge *yourselves* unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles' (Acts 13:46). Why is one consigned to perdition while another is not? Not as the result of an arbitrary partiality: 'there is no respect of persons with God, (Romans 2:11); but rather because one is good and the other bad; the one became a believer, and the other remained an unbeliever: for 'some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not,' (Acts 28:24); or the one is obedient and the other rebellious. Compare 'Come, ye blessed...For I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat,' etc., with 'Depart from *Me*, ye cursed, into everlasting fire... For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me *no* meat,' etc. (compare Matthew 25:34 and the verses following with verse 41 and the verses following). If all this be so, 'reprobation' is no decree, nor is it included in the decree of God, for wicked men reprobate themselves; and some of the elect can and do perish, regardless of any decree of God.

CALVINISM declares that we know only so much about reprobation as God has seen fit to reveal, but that it is important we do know *that* much. The Bible teaches that the elect are by nature just as wicked, depraved, and worthy of damnation as the reprobate: "Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto Me, O children of Israel? saith the LORD" (Amos 9:7). Yet the Lord had chosen the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and rejected the rest. For there is a personal election of some to salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13). There must, then, be other persons who are *not* elected to salvation. God has not appointed His elect unto wrath: "For God hath not appointed *us* to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). There must, it follows, be others who *are* appointed to wrath and to fatal stumbling: for Christ is "a stone of stumbling...to them which stumble at the

Word, being disobedient: whereunto also they *were* appointed” (1 Peter 2:8). There are some God gave to Christ: “all that the Father giveth Me” (John 6:37); there are others He did *not* give to Christ: “I pray *not* for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me” (17:9). There are some whose names were written in the book of life (Revelation 21:27); there are others “whose names were *not* written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 17:8). To some “it is given...to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [that are without, Mark 4:11] it is not given” (Matthew 13:11). There are some whose welfare we are to seek (Nehemiah 2:10); there are others concerning whom Christ commands, “Let them alone” (Matthew 15:14). See also Jeremiah 14:11; 7:16. Some are made accepted in Christ (Ephesians 1:6); others, “natural brute beasts, *made* to be taken and destroyed...shall utterly perish” (2 Peter 2:12).

But it is altogether out of place to object here that “God is no respecter of persons.” For if He were, no one would be saved! All would be damned; for all sinned. It is not so amazing that God saves “whom He will” as that He saves any! But this is not to present the complete picture. As Judge, God has respect to no man’s person and so can do no less than to conclude all under sin (Galatians 3:22). But as Savior, He makes men to differ (1 Corinthians 4:7); He distinguishes by “distinguishing mercy” one person from another. This is evident from the free dispensings of His grace. “The LORD *had respect* unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect” (Genesis 4:4–5).

Furthermore, it is only the reprobate who are such children of disobedience that they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life; they make a covenant with death (Isaiah 28:15). To that disobedience they were sovereignly appointed (1 Peter 2:8), and that self-adjudged unworthiness is their actual state and condition to which they were of old (from eternity) ordained (Jude 4). Hence, “Art Thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God...? *we* shall not die. O LORD, Thou hast ordained *them* for judgment” (Habakkuk.

1:12). Concerning that “we” God says, “You only have I known [loved] of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). Here is reference to the divine, eternal foreknowledge that is not synonymous with prescience or mere knowledge beforehand. “To foreknow” means to love from eternity. “God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew” (Romans 11:2).

This love of God to the believer is the ground of the believers’ love to Him. “I...know [love] My sheep, and am known [loved] of Mine” (John 10:14). But of the rest Christ denounces, “I never knew [loved] you” (Matthew 7:23). Not even before the universe came into being did He know them—He *never* knew them! “For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). Every plant that He has not planted shall be uprooted (Matthew 15:13), and for the reason that it was not the divine purpose to engraft them into Christ or plant them as trees in His garden. This makes clear the fact that God is not only sovereign in His goodness, but also in His severity (Romans 11:22), and that His sovereignty is absolute and independent: “therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth” (9:18). The hardened ones are so because He willed to harden them; He willed to show the power of His wrath upon them; they had to be prepared unto glory (as were the vessels of mercy) but are vessels made unto dishonor, “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” (Romans 9:21–23).

Consequently, why some are gifted with faith (and all good works) by God in time, and some are not so gifted, is determined by God’s eternal decree. And that decree does not have chief reference to the Fall of man, or even to the sins of the reprobate. For it was made, “the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil” (Romans 9:11). Rather, the decree has primary reference to the sovereign good pleasure and will of God, “who worketh all things [including reprobation] after the counsel of His own will” (Ephesians 1:11). Election is the main object of the eternal purpose of God. The Fall and reprobation are subservient to that main object. “The LORD hath made all things for Himself [for His own

purpose]; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Proverbs 16:4).

Limited Atonement

ARMINIANISM supposes that the atonement of Christ is “not according to a certain and definite decree to save some, but was made according to a general, conditional offer of grace which God desired to make to all men absolutely and indiscriminately, ‘who will have *all* men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (I Timothy 2:4). But, being conditional, the death of Christ does not infallibly secure the salvation of anyone. The word ‘atonement’ is not to be understood in the sense that it makes salvation *actual*, but that it merely provided a *possible* salvation for the whole human race: ‘and He is the propitiation (provided remedy) for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole *world*’ (I John 2:2). This possibility remains even for the so-called reprobate: see the story of Cain—‘if thou doest not well, sin (a sin-offering) lieth at the door’ (Genesis 4:7). In its extent, therefore, the atonement is universal: He died for all the ungodly; the gospel being for ‘whosoever,’ ‘whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,’ (Acts 2:21). God loves everybody; He can hate nobody (John 3:16). The preaching of the gospel is grace for all who hear; for ‘gospel’ means ‘good news’; but if the gospel provides salvation for the elect only, it cannot be good news to those for whom no possible provision of salvation has been made. This being so, the cross must be outfitted like a blank check, providing universal redemption, payable to the endorser, merely for his endorsement, which in turn completes the stipulated terms of the atonement.” By reason of this the final effectuation of election and salvation depends upon the free will of man. As a result, all or none may be saved! “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” (Lamentations 1:12) is so understood as that it may be anything to anybody.

CALVINISM sponsors the biblical doctrine of particular atonement, which does more than to render salvation possible, but secures the actual salvation of those for whom Christ died; and He died for those the Father gave to Him (John 17: 2, 12). In the same manner, that death is not for a vague, general “whosoever,” but for “whosoever *believeth*” (3:16); and they only believe who were ordained to eternal life (Acts 13:48). This implies that the “whosoever” must be the called according to His purpose and grace (2 Timothy 1:9).

Notice then, when the Scripture says that Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6), it does not say that He died for *all* the ungodly. Where the word “all” does appear in connection with the atonement of Christ, it has a meaning limited by the context. The arm of the Lord is not revealed to *all* (Isaiah 53:1). Why not? Because the Lord had sovereignly determined to harden and blind the rest so that they *could not* believe (John 12:37–40). In 1 Corinthians 15:22 (Romans 5:18) “all” means all in Christ; otherwise the Arminian will prove more than he wants to prove. In 1 Timothy 2:4 it is all classes of men.

So with the word “any.” See 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise [which is never made to the reprobate], as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to *us*-ward, not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance.” God is long-suffering to *us* (His elect); and He is not willing that *any of us* should perish. Who are the “any”? the “us”? According to the context, the “beloved” of verse 1, the “beloved” of verse 8; He is not willing that any of His beloved should perish. So He is long-suffering over *them*. But take “any” in the unqualified, absolute sense, and the text is made to contradict other Scripture, where, for example, it says that God *is* “willing to show His wrath” upon the “vessels of wrath,” and cause them under that wrath to end in destruction (Romans 9:22). However, it is different with His “beloved.” They shall never perish.

Another distinction is to be noted in the word “world.” Did Christ die for the whole world of men without exception? No, but for the world of “whosoever believeth” (John 3:16), for the world that has its sin actually and really taken *away* (1:29). The Lamb loves that world; He takes *away* its sin. But of the wicked world it is said, “your sin *remaineth*” (9:41). Their sins lie (crouch) at their own door, to pounce on them like a roaring lion, dragging them down to the pit of hell. For them the sin-offering and intercession of Christ are not, nor for the whole world of all mankind, but only for those the Father gave Him (17:9). But assuming He did die for absolutely the whole world, why does He not pray for it? “I pray for *them*; I pray *not* for the world.” The truth of the matter is that there is an elect world, a world with its sin removed (1:29), and a “world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:5). Teach, however, that Christ died for all the sins of all men, and the following results: God demands the penalty for sin twice!—once at the hands of His Son who paid it all, and again at the hands of those for whom He died (now in hell, themselves paying that already canceled debt!). But Christ lays down His life exclusively for the sheep. To the rest He says, “Ye are *not* of My sheep” (John 10:15, 26). He does not lay down His life for *them*.

Nor will it do to say that God originally *intended* to save all. For from the beginning it was not so (Genesis 3:15). At the first, God put enmity between the children of God and the children of the devil. From the first, the cross divided all men into these two separate companies. Clearly, the cross was never intended to save the serpent’s brood, for the cross sovereignly maintains the ordained enmity against the serpent’s seed. And though temporal gifts flow from the cross, they are not a blessing but a curse to that reprobate seed: “The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the just. Surely He scorneth the scorners: but He giveth grace unto the lowly” (Proverbs 3:33–34). The gospel itself must be and is to them a curse (2 Corinthians 2:15 and following), not a blessing. They “are perishing” (Greek) because the cross is not saving to them (1 Corinthians 1:18).

From this it should be plain that God does not love all without exception. Did God love Pharaoh (Romans 9:17)? Did He love the Amalekites (Exodus 17:14 and verses following)? Did He love the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 20:16–17) or the Ammonites and Moabites (23:3)? Does He love the workers of iniquity (Psalm 5:5)? Does He love the vessels of wrath (Romans 9:22)? Did He love Esau (Romans 9:13)? Does He love “the people against whom [He] hath indignation for ever” (Malachi 1:4)? What is the central purpose of the cross? To “save *His people* [and them only] from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Irresistible Grace

ARMINIANISM insists that man can and does often resist divine grace (Acts 7:51); that the gospel does not present impossibilities to the sinner, but where God commands, there man is able to obey. For the Lord gives every sinner the ability to believe, then expects the sinner by his free will to exercise faith and consent to the terms of salvation. Sinners can therefore accept or reject the offer of grace at their pleasure, since it obviously is of him that willeth and of him that runneth (holds out). God does His part for man’s salvation, in fact, has done all He can for man without destroying his free agency. So God frequently, in His great efforts to save man, is displeased with Himself and the results He finally obtains. He sets His heart on the sinner to deliver him and, as it were, labors till the going down of the sun to deliver him (Daniel 6:14).

Why God sometimes experiences this lack of success in accomplishing the attempted deliverance is that He has created man with a will sovereign in its own right: “Wherefore say My people, We are lords [sovereigns]; we will come no more unto Thee?” (Jeremiah 2:31). For this reason God’s counsel can be annulled and rendered ineffectual by the perverse wills of impenitent sinners: “I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of My reproof” (Proverbs 1:24–25).

The unavoidable inference is that it remains in man's power to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted. And since man has such power to choose or refuse, it may very well happen that all the works of grace that God uses to convert man may be so opposed, the Holy Spirit so resisted that his salvation is prevented, though it was originally possible.

CALVINISM rejoices in the truth that saving grace is irresistible. God does not save any against their will, it is true. Nevertheless "it is *not* of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Romans 9:16). The wicked do invariably and consistently disregard the counsel of God as to its precepts. But the counsel of God as to its eternal purpose, which embraces sin itself in its divine plan, is incapable of being set at nought. "For who hath resisted His will" (Romans 9:19)? Man's will is always subservient to God's sovereign will. God is always Almighty God!

Therefore they who resisted the Spirit did *not* resist the Spirit in *them*, for they were devoid of the Spirit. But that resistance is to the Spirit in the prophets and in the ministers of the Lord; it is resistance to the external calls and reproofs through the preaching of the Word. But when the Spirit *is* in men in His grace of conversion, and so acts with a will to convert, He thus makes them willing and turns them forever to Himself. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power" (Psalm 110:3). Unregenerate men may and will refuse and repudiate God's Word all they please and disregard His admonitions years on end. But when the time comes for God's counsel to be fulfilled in their conversion, then God's mercy at the precise moment decreed shall invincibly overcome their obstinacy, causing them gladly to trust and obey Him. "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the *time* to favour her, yea, the *set time*, is come" (Psalm 102:13). What more conclusive testimony that never by free will (John 1:12, 13; Romans 9:16; Zechariah 4:6) are we saved, but by God's irresistible power (Ephesians. 1:19) working in us a new heart, removing hardness (and unwillingness), and inscribing God's law in our heart (Ezekiel 36:26 and verses following)!

The dead sinner does not open his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ and let Him come in to save. That is an idea prominent in Arminian hymnology, but it is nowhere in Scripture. Christ must first open the heart (Acts 16:14) and then the heart receives Him. Christ must first come to the sinner, so that the sinner may come to Him. God gives the elect to Christ in eternity. That guarantees that in time they “*shall* come” to Him (John 6:37). Man, of himself, has not the ability to come to Jesus, will not come (John 5:40), and cannot will to come until the Father draws him (John 6:44). God’s giving the new heart *causes* the renewed sinner to walk in His ways. How else can a heart of stone open to Him? How can a heart that is enmity against God be willing for Him to improve it? But assume that the power of God’s saving grace can be baffled, and God must be supposed to will that all men be saved. Yet nevertheless it must finally be, not as He wills, but as they will! However, the truth remains that grace saves those who are “the called according to *His* purpose” (Romans 8:28)—saves with an almighty power—for they *must* be saved with an everlasting salvation!

Perseverance of the Saints

ARMINIANISM wrests Scripture to teach that it is possible for the true believer to fall from the grace of salvation (Galatians 5:4); and that each believer is provided with sufficient ability to persevere and preserve himself, if only he will (“And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life,” John 5:40). It all depends on the choice of man’s will, whether he will persevere or not. (This denies everything thus far so irrefutably declared!) The error continues: not only is it possible that believers fatally and finally fall, sin unto death, and be eternally lost, but indeed they may often fall, be often recovered, yet in the end be lost to God. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). There is, then, no such thing in this life as certainty of eternal security, nor assurance of perseverance: “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is

a devil?” “And began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I?” (John 6:70; Matthew 26:22).

CALVINISM is strong in the divine Word that no true believer can ever fall from Christ and salvation. For He promises, “I give unto them [the sheep] eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:28–29). This promise is made unconditionally to God’s people. It is not qualified by any additions of “ifs,” “buts,” “perhaps,” “maybes,” etc., but is to be understood in its plain, unencumbered, unequivocal sense. God’s covenant is equally sure. In that covenant He swears that He will never leave His people and will so keep them that they shall never forsake Him: “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me” (Jeremiah 32:40).

So our salvation and our remaining in that salvation in no way depends on us, or on our feeble will. Yet we are confident of this very thing (not of our doing, but) that He who has begun a good work in us will perform and perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). We trust not in our own strength (we have none!), but in Him is power to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before Him! And when the elect do fall, the Lord raises them up (Proverbs 24:16). So *He* is faithful, who will not suffer us to perish, but will establish us and *keep* from evil (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Of this the believer may be certain and have the assurance of faith now and forever, even though, within the organism of the church, there are some who depart from God in unbelief. But the elect “are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Hebrews 10:39). “The righteous also shall hold on his way,” and as God has promised, he shall never depart from that way; but rather he shall become “stronger and stronger” (Job 17:9).

The believer *remains* a believer; he *does* persevere to the end, not by human effort, but by the power of God. This power is exerted on his behalf not for any worthiness in him, but for the sake of the Lamb who alone is worthy! The believer, meanwhile and always, belongs unto Jesus his faithful Savior, “who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:8).

Conclusion

The truth is never popular. We are, however, not concerned with what is popular, but with what is right. The truth of Scripture is one thing. What men would like to be true is another. The question is, Are we willing to be bound by the Word of God? No matter what the cost? Too few are willing to be that self-denying. The hatred of the natural mind against God is such that though a man be shrewd, intelligent, and able to see the arguments on both sides, yet he will not admit the fundamental doctrine of absolute sovereign grace to be true; or, if he *know* it to be true, still he refuses to receive it. If an angel from heaven were to stand before Him and declare that God redeems both objectively and subjectively only His elect people, and that Christ Jesus prays not for the world, but only for those the Father gave Him, such a (natural) man will not, cannot believe it.

This whole system of truth is contrary to the old nature; it is the opposite to what men think to be in agreement with justice and experience. So the many who hate this doctrine are always ready to oppose it. Therefore also comprehended under the brand of Arminianism are the following evil forms of the same proud heresy: Universalism, Romanism, Pelagianism (naturalism), Socinianism (modernism), Amyraldianism (synergism), Baxterianism (hypothetical redemption), New School Presbyterianism (religious humanism), etc. Calvinism, the truth, is rejected and vehemently attacked from every quarter. We know this from Scripture, reports, history, and personal experience.

But this does not change the eternal purpose of God. For “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His” (2 Timothy 2:19). Suppose every preacher in the U.S.A. or in the world speaks the very opposite to these points! That means, humanly speaking, we are in a very, very unpopular minority. But with God and His truth on our side (or rather, we being on His side), we are on the side of the majority! Finally, it is our calling to preach that which God has clearly revealed. We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard.

The following pamphlets are also available upon request:

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