

Arminianism vs. Calvinism

Introduction and definitions:

Arminianism vs. Calvinism has been an ongoing theological debate for the last several hundred years or so and today we have entire bible institutions and seminaries that support either one side or the other. This is not the way it should be in the body of Christ, for the question brings division rather than unity. Contrary to the scriptures of, “being in one accord, (of like mind)”, [Acts 1:14](#), [2:1](#), [2:46](#), [4:24](#), [5:12](#), [8:6](#), [15:25](#) and [Philippians 2:2](#).

When I was younger in Christ, I would have been eager to take part in this debate. Now that I have more maturity in the Lord, I see that arguing theology brings division rather than unity among the people in the body of Christ and for this reason alone I hesitate to even debate the question. However, I believe understanding the principal points of the two doctrines and their extremes is foundational to establishing our personal beliefs and growing in our Christian walk, so that we can realize the value of what we have in Christ and live the victorious Christian life here on earth.

Definition summaries of both doctrine beliefs are:

- John Calvin, a French theologian, 1509-1564, is accredited with being the originator of the doctrine. Calvinism emphasizes the total depravity, inability and helplessness of mankind, unconditional election along with irresistible grace, holding strongly to a doctrine of predestination determined only by God, Himself. That Christ has granted salvation to only certain select men and man has no say in whether he will achieve salvation or damnation. This doctrine was mainly adopted by the reform churches during the 16th century.
- Jacob Hermansz, a Dutch theologian, 1560-1609, is accredited as being instrumental in bringing forth the Arminianism doctrine. Arminianism emphasizes man's free-will and human ability to choose whether to come into repentance and enter into the calling that Christ has for each of us through the grace that He has provided for us. Thus, summarizing that Christ has purchased salvation for all men and we have a decisive role in whether to accept or reject our salvation.

This paper will address these major points.

- Does man have free-will to accept or reject God's gift of salvation or does God's sovereignty rule over our decision?
- What does the scriptures mean when it talks about “predestination”, are we predestined and what are we predestined to?
- To what degree does man control his own destiny? Arminianism would say: greatly, Calvinism would say: not at all.

These questions, I feel are critical to one's personal growth and walk with the Lord. For we all build upon our core understanding, and if that foundational view is one of an inability to direct your own future, feeling perhaps helpless. That will greatly affect our growth and walk with the Lord.

Can man choose salvation or is it decided for him by God?

Jesus told people and gave them a choice to repent and be saved, for He said, "[repent for the kingdom of God is at hand](#)." I think Jesus saying this pretty much tells us that man has free-will (the right to choose his own thoughts and ultimately his own actions). For we see man's free-will as early as in Genesis chapter 3, when man chose to disobey and eat of the forbidden fruit. Likewise, God has also given man the choice of whether to turn to Christ or to reject Him.

Scripture shows that Christ died for all men, and that whoever believes on Him will be saved. Salvation has been accomplished through Christ for all men, but it is our choice whether we receive Christ and His gift of salvation or we reject Him, as shown in the scriptures below.

- For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, **1st Corinthians 15:22**.
- **That whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved, John 3:15-17.**
- That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved, **Romans 10:9**.

All men have the gift of grace, and God's will is that all men should come to repentance.

- For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, **Titus 2:11**.
- The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, **2nd Peter 3:9**.

Salvation has been provided to all men. Scripture tells us that plainly. That man's salvation is based on confessing Christ, (that Jesus is the Son of God and that God raised Him from the dead,) **Romans 10:9**. Thus, man has the choice to either choose God's gift of salvation or to reject it. God has made His gift of salvation available to all men, however, He will not force our hand and make us accept it, for He has given man free-will to choose salvation or to reject it. Thus the doctrine of Calvinism is wrong on this point.

Is man predestined, and if so what to?

God knows the beginning from the end, but man does not! Whereby to say you are predestined holds a truth, however, it is foolish for man to accept an unknown destination that is not of his own desire or choice. By believing that you have a predestination that is beyond your will and uncontrolled takes away any motivation you may have of ever achieving something greater or even maintaining what you think you once had. The word "predestined" is used in the scriptures four times, as shown below twice in both Romans and Ephesians.

- ²⁹ For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified. ³¹ What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?, **Romans 8:29-31**.
- ⁴ According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: ⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the beloved, **Ephesians 1:4-6**.
- ¹⁰ That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in Him: ¹¹ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will: ¹² That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, **Ephesians 1:10-12**.

For God has saved us and called (*predestined*), us unto a holy calling, **2nd Timothy 1:9**.

Each scripture speaks of being predestined and even equipped unto a calling of God. These scriptures do not speak of issues of salvation, (heaven and hell), as the doctrine of Calvinism says or implies. Calvinists claim that God only foreknew certain select men, this is wrong. God foreknew all men, for all men are made in the image of God, **Genesis 1:26-27**, and thus all men have been predestined into a holy calling and to be conformed into the image of His Son Jesus Christ.

Who has saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, **2nd Timothy 1:9**.

Thus the doctrine of Calvinism is wrong on this point. No man is predestined to hell, for man has a free-will and he decides his final destination, either heaven or hell.

To what degree does man control his own destiny?

A man's heart devises his way: but the LORD directs his steps, **Proverbs 16:9**.

O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walks to direct his steps, **Jeremiah 10:23**.

For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he: **Proverbs 23:7**.

This is a much harder question to address, for the answer is dependent on the individual, this will become apparent as we look further into the question. Everyone needs to answer this question for themselves and establish their own belief. Calvinism taken to its extreme tells you that man has no control over his destiny and this can result in hopelessness. Arminianism seeks the other extreme and implies that man has much control over his destiny and if we lack understanding, this results in self-pride and frustration, when our ways do not always come to pass. Scripture tell us, “who are we that we should say, we will go here and get gain, for we do not know what tomorrow shall bring, rather we should say if the Lord wills we shall do this”, **James 4:13-15**. The two old testament scriptures I put above tell us that it is not man's ways to direct his steps, these scriptures talk of the carnal man, the old man led by only his 5-senses, what we (see, hear, smell, taste and feel) – the man that we were before we put on Christ and took up the mind of Christ. Whereby the old man – our old nature is not able to direct our own steps, the new man – having the mind of Christ is able to direct our steps, if we are truly being led by God's Spirit within us.

This point also shows the main difference between the two doctrines. Calvinism focuses primarily on the carnal man, the old man is helplessly and hopelessly depraved. However, we should be focusing on the new man having the mind of Christ and being led by God's Spirit. Our walk with the Lord may be an on-going process and in this life time, none of us ever fully there. But, rather than falling back into the habits and the thoughts of our old man, (what is known and even seems comfortable), embracing Calvinism, we should be striving to increase our relationship with the Lord and put on that new man.

I said up front that the answer to the question is depended on the individual, both doctrines hold certain truths within their own focus. It is up to the individual as to their desire and degree that they want of Christ's Word and freedom. The defining question is; are you content with living as a natural carnal man enjoying only what the world can offer you or are you desiring more, looking for all the riches Christ has for you and willing to pay the costs to achieve them? Here, I believe that the philosophy of the new-renewed man aligns more with Arminianism.

Conclusion:

I have attempted to answer this with scripture and not with man's philosophies or personal opinions, letting scriptures, (God's Word), answer the questions. According to scriptures, I have found two doctrinal points of Calvinism to be misleading and incorrect, and believing in Calvinism will actually keep you within boundaries of uncertainties, that you feel you have no control over. God has given man a free will to accept or reject Christ's gift of salvation, for He has predestined us with a holy calling and it is our choice whether we are going to take up our calling. Thus I have found Arminianism to be the better and more accurate doctrine.

Calvinism attains its foundational points by looking at the un-renewed natural man, for the old carnal man is hopelessly and helplessly depraved. Scripture tells us, not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, **Romans 12:2**. Arminianism attains its foundational points by looking at the new-renewed man. Whereby, in this physical life we may always be striving to achieve the fullness of the new man, we must realize that we are called to do just that. Therefore, I see Arminianism to also have the better foundation.

Our job is to speak God's Word, (the truth), it is the Holy Spirit's job to change, convict a person, we cannot do His job and He will not do our job. When we come across a foundational debate like this, I believe we need to know and share the truth, however, we often start blasting the other person's belief, don't do this! We should rather speak in love from a firm grounding of God's Word, focused on the common ground that we both have in Christ Jesus.

Most all theological debates produce only division, rather than bringing unity to the body of Christ. If we would major and focus on the love and the goodness of God, I believe that most theological questions would be answered for us or perhaps just become irreverent.

Lastly, walking in the Spirit will lead us into all truth. God's Word is written to our spirit and our heart, not our intellect. So I encourage you to accept God's gift of His Holy Spirit, (the baptism of the Holy Spirit), **Luke 11:13**. Then learn to walk and be guided by His Spirit and His Spirit will teach you all things, **John 14:26**, for the Holy Spirit is the best teacher of all, and He will lead you into all truth.

