

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Unit 1
The Nature of Salvation
Week 3 – Calvinism, Arminianism and God's Sovereignty

Introduction

Doctrinal Overview

Calvinism:

Starting point for Calvinist/Reformed theology:

(Isa. 46:10,11) ...My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. (11)... What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.

- **T**otal Depravity:

(Rom. 3:11,12) ... there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless . . .

(John 6:44, 65) No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day....(65)And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."

- **U**nconditional Election:

(Eph. 1:4,5) He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. (5) In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will . . .

(1 Pet. 2:8) . . . they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

(Romans 9:16,18,22-24) So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy . . . (18) So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires . . . (22) What if God, although willing

to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? (23) And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, (24) even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

Double predestination:

(John Calvin) "... (God) does not create everyone in the same condition, but ordains eternal life for some and eternal damnation for others." (Cited in Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 396)

- **L**imited Atonement:

- **I**rresistible Grace:

(Jn. 6:37) All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

(Acts 13:48) When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

- **P**erseverance of the Saints:

(2 Pet. 1:10) Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.

(Heb. 3:6,14) Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end . . . For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.

Implications for Evangelism

Positive	Negative
"Since Christ has elected people to salvation, I can persevere in witnessing with the confidence that I will be fruitful."	"If God has already decided who will be saved and irresistibly calls them, does it really matter whether I witness or not?"

Arminianism:

Starting point for Arminian theology:

(2 Pet. 3:9*) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

(1 Tim. 2:4) (God) desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- **T**otal Depravity: People cannot respond to the gospel without God's help. But God has enabled all people to respond to his convicting influence.

(John 12:32) "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

(John 16:8) "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment . . . "

(Henry C. Thiessen) "Since mankind is hopelessly dead in trespasses and sins and can do nothing to obtain salvation, God graciously restores to all men sufficient ability to make a choice in the matter of submission to him. This is the salvation-bringing grace of God that has appeared to all men."¹

- **C**onditional Election:

(Romans 4:4,5) Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. (5) But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness . . .

¹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 344-345.

Predestination and election are based on God's foreknowledge (presumably) of our decision to trust Christ.

(1 Peter 1:1,2*) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen (2) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

(Romans 8:29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;

- **Unlimited Atonement:**

(1 John 2:2*) He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

(2 Corinthians 5:19) God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

(1 Tim. 4:10) For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

- **Resistible Grace:**

(Matt. 23:37) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."

(Luke 7:29,30) And when all the people and the tax-gatherers heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. (30) But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

- **Present Assurance of Salvation:**

Implications for Evangelism

Positive	Negative
"I am motivated to share my faith because I know that more will be saved if I am faithful as Christ's ambassador."	"Evangelism is a heavy burden since my friend's salvation depends on my witness."

Passages Arminians must harmonize

(John 6:37) "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."

Calvinists

Arminians

(John 6:44,65) "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" . . .(65) And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."

Calvinists

Arminians

(Acts 13:48) And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Calvinists

Arminians

(Romans 9:1-24)

Calvinists

Arminians

Note:

(Ephesians 1:4,5) . . . just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will . . .

Calvinists

Arminians

God's election and predestination are based on his foreknowledge of our choice to believe in Christ

(1 Peter 2:8) . . . and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

Some Calvinists

Arminians

(Jude 1:4) For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Calvinists

Arminians

Summary:

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Practical implications of God's sovereignty

God' sovereignty: God owns, rules, and sustains the creation. No one and nothing can thwart him from ultimately _____.

God's sovereign work in history:

- God chooses _____ for specific roles (Ezekiel 38:4; Psalm 33:10,11; Psalm 2:1-6).
- God selects _____ for specific roles in his national strategy (2 Samuel 7:8; Isaiah 45:1; Daniel 4:32,34-35).
- God can use the _____ of human beings to advance his purposes (e.g. the death of Christ in Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27,28).
- God intervenes at the end of history to _____ (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 11:15; 19:15-20:15).

God's sovereign work in our day-to-day lives:

- God decides what _____ we get (1 Cor. 12:11) and calls individuals to _____ (Acts 13:1,2; Gal. 1:15,16; 1 Cor. 12:18).
- God promises _____ for his people.

Application:

Circumstances: If we understand God's sovereignty, we realize that all persons and all situations in my life can be used by God as part of His wise design to develop me spiritually. Everything we go through can benefit us if we choose to cooperate with God. No person or situation can thwart God's plan to make Himself known to & through you.

Fear: The biblical antidote to fear is directly tied to an awareness that God will ultimately protect us (Psalm 27) and that his purposes will not be thwarted (Revelation 1:17;2:10).

Our "need" for control: When I trust God's sovereignty, I don't have to get my way and manipulate people into doing what I want. I can trust that God may choose to work though different means and/or at a different time than I had in mind. When I try to control, I am acting as if I believe people can take away what God has promised me.

Fellowship: The composition of our home group is not an accident. If I trust in God's sovereignty, I will view the people in my life as people God has brought to me so I can receive and give to them (1 Corinthians 12:21). A sense of "compatibility" will not be my main concern. People that are

different from me and difficult for me are God's tools to shape my character. I will also realize that God sends people to me to teach me and correct me. I can lower my defensiveness when I realize God may be speaking to me through them.

Conflict: Conflict is seen as much vertically (between your self and God) as it is horizontally (between yourself and others). Seen apart from God's sovereignty, conflict is simply me vs. you, me proving I'm right, me winning, etc. If I trust in God's sovereignty, I don't always have to win and defend - God can teach me through conflict even if the other person is wrong and misunderstands me.

Suffering: If I trust in God's sovereignty, I will have the hope that God will bring good out my suffering - even if I don't see it at the time. Suffering cannot take away what God wants to give me. Because of God's sovereignty, we are never helpless victims.

Parenting: Without a perspective on God's sovereignty, we will increase our attempts to control as we feel threatened - or withdraw in defeat.

Our Service to God (Ministry): Our service to God is not something we make happen or force (Mt. 28:18, 20). Do we think about and rely on Matt. 16:18? There Jesus declares, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not withstand it."

Evangelism: If I trust in God's sovereignty, I know that God wants to reach people and is able to orchestrate events so that I will cross paths with someone who wants to truly know him. We should prayerfully anticipate this as we interact with people in our community each day.

Discipleship: Hope and vision (rather than fatalism and discouragement) is based on the belief that God is committed to active involvement in the life of the person you are discipling. This gives the discipler the patience to invest over the long haul.

Failure: Failure is part of our training and spiritual history. Without God's sovereignty, failure is simply wasted effort and an area of shame. Failure is avoided, and when encountered, is often denied. We also look to blame others. Oswald Sanders has a different perspective on failure based on God's sovereignty:

“The God of Jacob is preeminently the God of the second chance to Christians who have failed and failed persistently. The second chance does not avert the consequences of past failure, but even failure can be a steppingstone to new victories. To the child of God failure can have an important educative value. God does not waste

even failure. The outstanding lesson of Jacob's life is that no failure need be final. There is hope with the God of Jacob for any disposition or temperament. No past defeat puts future victory out of reach. When God has saved and apprehended a person, He pursues him with undiscourageable perseverance that He might bless him. God will turn the tables on the Devil by creating a wider ministry out of our very defeats."²

Memory Verses

1 Peter 1:1b-2* – Election is based on God's foreknowledge (evidently of who chooses to believe in Christ).

1 John 2:2* – Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world, not just of believers.

2 Peter 3:9* – God's will is for all people to be saved.

Assignment

- Study for the exam.

Selected Bibliography

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² J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Maturity* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1994 edition) p. 33.