

A Historical Controversy

Calvinism vs. Arminianism

Introduction

This particular study seeks to answer the question: *is God's provision of salvation best explained in Calvinistic or Arminian terms?* Perhaps a good starting point would be to clarify some titles.

The term Calvinism refers to the doctrines set forth by the Reformer John Calvin, and developed by his successors in the Protestant church world-wide. This has come to be called Reformed Theology. The distinctives of Calvinism center on five key points that explain the doctrinal basis of the Gospel. Although nicknamed Calvinism by opponents, most the Reformers held these five points.

Historic Christianity has mainly been Reformed in its theology since the mid 1500's. Certainly all its key confessions were Calvinistic, whether they were Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist or Congregational. Even the early Brethren movement was largely Calvinistic in Gospel truths. *Calvinism expresses the faith of the martyrs, confessors and reformers, the faith in which the majority of Christ's true people have lived and died ... it is the truth of God.* (John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, Sprinkle Pub. P. vii)

Arminianism stems from the teachings of Jacob Arminius [1560-1609] that diverged from the Reformed view of predestination. His followers (the *Remonstrants*) took these views even further and solidified their position in five points in the early 1600's that led to their denunciation by the Synod of Dort in 1619. It was here that the Calvinistic five points were clearly spelled out in distinction to the Arminian theology:

- T otal Depravity
- U nconditional Election
- L imited Atonement
- I rresistible Grace
- P erseverance of the Saints

Methodism is the main Arminian representative in history (although even portions of that were Reformed like the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales). From it stems the Holiness movement and the Revivalist movements, which were strongly Arminian, or even Pelagian in the case of Charles Finney and his successors, and from this comes the modern crusade evangelistic movements and Pentecostalism. Roman Catholicism is also a works based religion and history shows that Jesuits have encouraged Arminianism to undermine Protestantism at various times.

The influence of Arminianism in modern times is enormous, mainly due to the influence of various evangelistic organizations and the effects of popular books. The average evangelical Christian is probably Arminian in his

understanding of the Gospel. It must also be said that our time is seeing a dearth of theological awareness, many being blown about by every wind of doctrine, a dangerous over-dependence upon experiences, reliance upon 'professional' ministers or leaders, and a concomitant fall out of casualties on all sides.

Salvation

Today there are many forms of salvation being offered just as there are many available gods.

- Universalism teaches everyone is saved or will be saved.
- The false religions of Buddha, Hinduism, Islam etc set forth a variety of plans of salvation.
- The New Age speaks of releasing the “god” with in you.
- In Pelagianism man saves himself through a decision, good works, church membership and his free will.

A study of the Bible gives us only two possible options concerning the gospel.

- Salvation is something that God provides, initiates, and controls totally.

Or

- God only potentially provides salvation; man must initiate his personal conversion and co-operate with God to complete it.

There are no other options. These in turn lead to two different pictures of God:

- The first picture is that of an all powerful, completely sovereign God in total control of everything, past, present and future, who loves man so much that he actually saves those He has chosen and brings them through to the end.

Or...

- The second picture is that of a God who loves indiscriminately (i.e. everyone), but not enough to guarantee the salvation of anyone; who has left the initiation of salvation to mere man; who hopes that people will respond to his gracious offer and who cannot control the destiny of those that do respond to his Gospel so that they could still be lost.

This is not an unfair caricature, though perhaps the comparison is not usually presented in this way. The first presentation is Calvinistic, the second is the Arminian nature of things.

The History of the Controversy

Throughout the ages a key struggle in theology has been between those that stressed the sovereignty of God in salvation (*monergism*) and those that elevated man (synergism). The Bible shows us a balance between the provision of God and the responsibility of man in many areas, but in salvation, even man's responsibility is activated by God. Man must respond to the Gospel, but God in his grace enables man to respond by changing his heart. This divine changing of the heart is done in regeneration which precedes the act of salvation.

In history, movements like Pelagianism began which elevated man, even to the position of being able to provide his own salvation. True Bible believers could not accept this course, but some of these weakened the Gospel by saying that man initiates or contributes to his salvation, apart from God and so there was the birth of semi-Pelagianism. The idea of man co-operating with God in effecting salvation was viewed as being acceptable.

The great Gospel champion, Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430), contended against Pelagius in the 5th century, and re-emphasized the New Testament teaching that salvation is all of God. God predestines those who are to be saved and ensures that they are saved. Although the Gospel is declared to all for the command to repent is open ended, only those who God has chosen will respond. The Reformers, starting with Martin Luther, rediscovered what Augustine taught and went to the Bible to search out the truth for themselves.

The current controversy between the Calvinist and the Arminian is not modern, but ancient. Throughout history, God has taught men to proclaim the truth in the face of opposition, salvation is of the Lord (*monergism*). That truth was then established, underlined and initiated periods of consolidation in the church. This happened, for instance, in the times of the Puritans in England, Knox in Scotland or Spurgeon in Victorian London.

The Heart of the Question

We have seen, then, the central issue: *Is salvation all of God; or is salvation partly of God and partly of man?* The two positions are very clear.

- Either God saves totally or God saves in principle only.
- Either man is powerless or man co-operates in his own salvation.
- Either those who are truly converted will persevere to the end in God's grace or salvation can be lost.
- Either man is depraved and unable to save himself or man is not totally depraved and is able to effect his own salvation.
- Either God elects those to be saved in eternity according to His own good pleasure or God only chooses those whom He sees in the future will respond to the Gospel.
- Either Christ died for the elect only or Christ's death is for all without exception leading to universalism or injustice.

Arminianism is, therefore, a sort of Semi-Pelagianism [Pelagius was a Celtic monk, ca 354-418], which emphasizes man's free will and ability to choose, to make a decision to be saved. The question is: *does the Bible show that man can accept and reject the Gospel, or is even his coming to Christ controlled by God? Does man choose or is he drawn? Is God in control of everything, or are some things beyond his power? Is God truly God?*

Man

The essence of Man's problem is selfishness. The Bible implies that the fall of Satan was due to pride (Isa 14:12-15), and his original temptation to Adam and Eve was towards self-determination; to controlling their own destiny, to be like God (Gen 3:5). Man always wants a finger in the pie. He cannot stand being uninvolved. If he is not able to control a thing, then he must have a measure of autonomy to satisfy his pride.

In understanding the processes of salvation, this desire for inclusion arises. In Pelagianism, man wants to control his salvation totally; he feels that he is not that bad and certainly not totally depraved. He can, therefore, determine his own future. This is so clearly unbiblical that Christians can see through it. However, it is harder to spot the watered down version since a few texts seem to support it.

In reality, this is man trying to determine his future again. Salvation is provided by God, say the Arminians, but it must be appropriated by each person for themselves. It must also be continued by their own strength or they will lose it. Any mention of God's foreknowledge must, therefore, mean that God looks down the window of time and searches for those who will have faith.

Such a view brings presuppositions to the Biblical text before it is interpreted. It is so hard for man to lay down his life in the things of God. Jesus

said that you must lose your life to save it (Matt. 10:38). The Arminian seems to be saying that you must use your life to save it. The Christian, by definition, is a follower of Christ. As such we should come to his word in submission, not presupposition.

It is hard for us to accept that we cannot contribute anything to a salvation which is all of God. It goes against the grain of our rebellious independence to accept that the only thing I bring to God in salvation is my utter need for mercy. The Bible does not say that my salvation is dependent upon my decision, my accepting Christ, my opening the door of my heart, my praying a certain type of prayer or anything else that arises from my life. In fact, what the Gospel does demand, faith and repentance, are specifically said to be given to us by God as a result of a heart regenerated by God (Eph 2:8; 2 Tim 2:25).

Dead in Sin

Without referring to many scriptural arguments to prove the issue, we will simply look at one; the argument of Paul in Ephesians 2, since this alone clears up the confusion.

“And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following

the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience... But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead ... made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) ... for by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God-not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:1-10).

Could anything be clearer than this? Let us list its component items. How can we study such a passage carefully and come to the conclusion that we contribute towards our salvation?

- In ourselves, **we are dead**. Not sick, mortally wounded, terminally ill - but dead. As far as God, or spiritual life, is concerned man is dead. He died with Adam in the Garden of Eden (Rom 5:12,15). Can a dead man do anything, let alone raise himself to life? Can a dead sinner contribute and help a Holy God in the act of salvation?

Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Romans 5:15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

- Even if we were alive, we are said to be **following, not only the world, but Satan** too. Will he help us aid God? Can we resist him without God's assistance? The world does not know God and is antagonistic to God, can its followers suddenly change and co-operate with God (1 John 3:1, 2:16)?

1 John 3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

- In addition, we were **following sensual desires** of body and mind, lusts. Does the sinful nature know how to follow God? Would it want to if it did know? Of course not (John 3:19; Rom 8:6-8).

John 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Romans 8:6-8 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. 8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

- We were described as **sons of disobedience**. Will the disobedient suddenly obey God? Obviously not; that is why we were said to be **children of wrath** by nature (Rom 8:7-8). God was angry with us (Psalm 5:5). God's judgment and wrath is hovering over every unjustified man like a sword of Damocles (John 3:36)

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. 8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Psalms 5:5 The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

The biblical picture is of a natural man that can do nothing to assist in his salvation. To emphasize this, the Scriptures explain God's part. First He has to **make us alive** before anything can occur. Jesus said in John 3:3, “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” Regeneration, a sovereign act of God, is the initial point in the process of salvation. Regeneration is not necessarily first in terms of time but of consecutive acts of God.

- This **salvation is of grace**, it is something given to a poor man. It is kindness which is unmerited. It is love given which is undeserved. “*Rich mercy*”, “*great love*”, and “*His grace*” are what Paul highlights in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

- It is an act of **mercy**. There is nothing in the object of salvation requiring that God should act this way. He does it in mercy. It is not a response in God to a decision, a prayer or an attitude. It is something God originates (Jonah 2:9).

Jonah 2:9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

- It involves God **raising us up with Christ** and seating us with him in heaven. How can we contribute to this?
- It is a **gift of God**. Does a person contribute to his or her own gifts? It is something offered freely by God.
- It is **through faith**, which itself is said to be **the gift of God**. It specifically states that this is not of our own doing. It is not a work of man in any way. The workmanship is of God and it began in eternity.

Many passages could be added to show that this is the teaching of the whole Bible. God is totally sovereign in salvation, but Ephesians 2:1-10 alone makes the point crystal clear.

God's Love

Everything God does involves total commitment and a finality of expression. God is God, he doesn't act like man. What he starts, He finishes. Ecclesiastes 3:14 says, *"I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him."* When God loves, He loves fully, finally and forever. If God just loved in a vague sort of way, He would not be God. If He put his love on some, and then they fell away, He could not be God.

God only does what will end in a full expression of His glory. His love is totally focused upon His Son. In this universe, it is the Son that is the object of God's love, and that is poured upon Jesus in fullness. Everything else is tainted by sin and is corrupted. God will not tolerate impurity or mixture, and all is consigned to wrath and judgment. Only that which is in Christ will not only survive, but also know the expression of God's love. Therefore, those loved by God are the elect in Christ, loved from eternity, chosen in the beloved. *Ephesians 1:4-5 According as he hath 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.*

God does not put his love upon an object destined to wrath. The sinner is said to be hated by God.

Psalms 11:5 The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. 6 Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. 7 For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.

Psalms 5:5 The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

Proverbs 3:33 The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.

It is true that God does have a Creator's love for His creation and expresses that love in common grace and mercy. It is also true that Christ loved the rich young ruler who turned away from Him (Mark 10:21). But it is equally true the sinner is said to be predestined to judgment. Theologians call them the reprobate. There are souls being fitted to destruction.

Romans 9:22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

The selection of some to life eternal and the passing by of others to destruction is called election. It is the eternal starting point of salvation. We can believe that our salvation began when Jesus agreed to die in our place as a lamb

slain from the foundation of the world, and God chose a bride to give to His son.

The giving of souls to the Son is taught in various passages.

John 17:2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

John 17:6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

John 17:9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.

The church consists of the souls given to the Son. Collectively this body of people is spoken of in terms of a bride.

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Rev 21:2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

To know the truth of the electing love and grace of God and to embrace that truth will lead the believer to overflowing worship that God should choose him in His mercy. And yet many Christians abhor this doctrine and demand 'fair play'. What is forgotten is that God is under no obligation to choose to save any member of the human race that rebelled against Him and joined forces with His enemy. Nevertheless, God decreed to reveal His love as well as His justice by choosing a portion—perhaps even the majority—of the human race to be saved in His Son.

Revelation 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

Those who are the objects of redeeming grace were loved from eternity and are seen as perfect and complete in Jesus by the God who is not limited by time.

Romans 8:30 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.

1 Corinthians 1:30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

Just as we cannot import our feelings into the Biblical concept of salvation, neither can we insist that God loves in the same manner as ourselves. He does not. We love in fits and starts, and often cease loving when injured. We only treat love glibly and superficially at best. God loves for eternity. This means that His love is not on the reprobate or His love would be in hell - the place of his wrath, the expression of His justice in the universe. Such an idea also ruins the Gospel. Why should anyone repent or seek God after being told that God already loves them in an absolute sense and without qualification?

The Call of the Gospel

At this point we should consider the actual proclamation of the Good News of salvation. If there is a limit to those who are saved in the elect, then how should we preach? There is an extreme form of Calvinism called Hyper-Calvinism which does not preach the Gospel to all indiscriminately. It falsely concludes that: if only the elect will be saved, then ministers should not preach good news to reprobates. Only when signs are revealed of God working in a person can the gospel be shared. This is wrong. It is a false rational conclusion that flies in the face of Biblical commands. Christian are instructed to “*Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation*” (Mark 16:15 see also Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47).

The opposite error is to tell everyone that God loves them indiscriminately and will give salvation to all without exception. You only have to pray and exercise your natural faith to receive it. This is Arminianism, and it is also false. There is no Biblical precedent to preach this way. The examples given to us in Acts never once use the term “*the love of God*”; in fact the word ‘love’ does not appear in Acts at all. What, then, is the Biblical way forward?

First, we must obey the clear word of Scripture that tells us to preach God's word to everyone. We cannot segregate people into elect and non-elect because we do not know who they are! But what is it that we preach?

First, we must explain that God is the Creator who has claims upon all people. We belong to Him and cannot live to please ourselves. This truth is taught in Acts 17:23-27. Speaking to the Athenians Paul said, “*For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. 24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds*

of their habitation; 27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.”

We then explain the demands of God's moral law which are the means He has given man to live in this world, and that everyone has fallen short of these demands.

Acts 17:30-31 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

As a result, all men are enemies of God. *Romans 5:10 “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”*

All men will face God's judgment on sin. However, Jesus has been sent to rescue those that come to Him for salvation. Everyone that repents of a wrong way of life and believes in Jesus Christ as Saviour, whose heart is changed and who confesses in his life that Jesus is Lord, will surely be saved from the wrath that is to come. Those that come to confess this can be encouraged to expect mercy and counseled to receive Christ as Lord (John 1:12) and be baptized (Acts 2:38).

John 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

So we explain in gospel preaching that God commands repentance (Acts 17:30) and faith (Acts 16:31).

Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

Those who obey are those whom God has enabled to do so by his grace. We cannot broadcast a global love of God or state that Jesus died for everyone in that room at that time. How can we do such a thing if many in that room will die in their sins? We can encourage all those that respond that they have been drawn by God. *John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Jesus said that many are called to repentance which is God's prescriptive will, meaning what God commands man to do, but only few are chosen, which refers to God's decretive will or what God effectually plans. *Matthew 22:14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."*

There is a difference between the general calling and the actual choosing of God. This difference is reflected in what theologians call the general call and the effectual call.

- While the general call is given to everyone, the effectual call is contained within the general call.
- The general call is external, the effectual call is to the elect.
- The general call applies the law, the effectual call applies grace.
- The general call commands all to believe and repent, the effectual call provides the ability to believe and repent.
- The general call results in obligation, the effectual call results in life to the elect.
- The general call can be rejected, the effectual call cannot be resisted.

Conclusion

We have seen that Calvinism or the doctrines of grace exalts God and Arminianism exalts man. Calvinism honors the Bible, Arminianism fails to do justice to the tenor of scripture and a great many clear texts. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The result of many years of an Arminian emphasis in the preaching of the Gospel in the Europe and in America has led to *an 'easy believism'* where almost anyone can be accepted as converted despite no evidence

of repentance or conviction of sin. The dreadful problems in our churches stem directly from this where dubious converts are being treated as Christians and require all sorts of ministry and healing techniques to resolve deep issues in their lives. Often a fruitless exercise.

In days gone by, the Gospel comforts were only applied to those who clearly showed signs of God's working as revealed in: an awareness of sin, a seeking of the Saviour, a desire for forgiveness and a deadly earnest to find peace with God. Our Calvinistic forefathers loved God and people too much to dispense with the rigors of the law and the threat of hell before they applied the good news. They were doctors who sought to reveal the disease before they applied the medicine. Only the truth sets us free. Weakening and falsifying the Gospel by making it sound attractive but unbiblical has dealt a severe blow to this country. A revival of true Biblical preaching is urgently required.

What About the Universal Texts?

There are a few texts that seem to support the Arminian position by suggesting that God's love is universalistic and not particular or that God loves everyone equally. Other verses seem to imply that Jesus dies for everyone

indiscriminately. There is not space here to deal with all the verses in detail. However, a few passages can at least be evaluated.

First, sound rules of interpretation insist that we should judge the meaning of the few and unclear texts in the light of the whole teaching of the Bible and texts which explain the position more fully. If we have judged the matter rightly, and the Bible's teaching is essentially in favor of the doctrines of grace, then these texts cannot contradict the weight of Scripture and they must mean something else. We cannot construct a theology on a few obscure verses and overturn the bulk of the Bible's clear teaching. The analogy of faith must guide our interpretation.

Secondly, some of the texts prove more than the Arminian would wish. If understood in the way suggested by Arminian apologists, they actually teach Universalism. For instance, **1 Timothy 2:4**: states that God desires all men to be saved. 1 Timothy 2:4 speaks of God *“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”*

Does this verse not clearly suggest that God has provided a global salvation which is left for man to grab hold of? The answer is, *“No!”*

If *“all men”* is interpreted as every man and woman without exception, then it clearly teaches that God will save every single person. This is strengthened by 1

Timothy 2:6, which states that Jesus gave himself as a ransom for *all*. “*Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*”

We know that not everyone is saved. The Bible's doctrine of salvation is not universalistic. Jesus even specifically said some of His hearers would be damned as He said in John 5:40 “*And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*” If only one person goes to hell who God willed to salvation and for whom Christ paid a ransom, then this understanding of 1 Timothy 2:4 makes God a liar and the atoning work of Christ on Calvary meaningless.

So these verses cannot apply to everyone on earth! The usual Reformed interpretation of this passage is to identify the “*all men*” as “*all types of men*”. Paul has suggested that thanksgivings be made for all men in verse one. 1 Timothy 2:1 *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.*

These words must mean all types of men, since it would be impossible to pray for everyone specifically in the world. This understanding is made clear as Paul begins to identify different types beginning with kings and those in high places. In other words, pray for those in authority in society, for God desires all

sorts of men to be saved, even these kings and princes who were oppressing the church at the time.

So “*all*” does not necessarily mean everyone who ever lived without exception; sometime all just means all without distinction. A concordance will show that all can be very restricted in its meaning. Notice the following passages.

- *Mark 11:32 But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for **all men** counted John, that he was a prophet indeed.*
- *Mark 5:20 And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and **all men** did marvel.*
- *Luke 3:15 And as the people were in expectation, and **all men** mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;*
- *John 3:26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and **all men** come to him.*

Taking a more restricted view of “all men” also explains Titus 2:11 which says, “*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.*”

A similar situation applies to the word world, particularly in **John 3:16**. “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*”

In trying to determine what the word “world” means in John’s writings it must be kept in mind that John often uses this word “world” in a restrictive sense as per John 12:19. *“The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after him.”* In John’s usage of the word “world” it is obvious that he does not mean everyone without exception but everyone without distinction.

In John 1:29 and John 3:17 the apostle would again imply a doctrine of Universalism if he meant everyone on the earth without exception.

- *John 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*
- *John 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

In John 17:3-9 the apostle records Jesus as specifically not praying for the world, but only a portion of it who would be saved. *“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. 4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. 6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me;*

and they have kept thy word. 7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. 8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. 9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”

John also tells believers not to love the world in 1 John 2:15-17. *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”*

How can we not love the world that God loves? We must obviously tread carefully here. God so loves the world of men that He wants a world of people to be saved and love Him. To this end He has decreed that a portion of the current world's population will be saved. In the end, God will have a world of people, a populated earth who are in Christ. It is not everyone or it would include those God has already damned, like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

John, like other writers (especially Peter) uses universalistic terms to make the point to Jews that salvation is now being made available to Gentiles as well.

Jews found this a difficult concept to grapple with. Salvation is now available to all the nations of the world.

2 Peter 3:9 and Ezek 33:11 are more difficult and have led to a variety of interpretations.

2 Peter 3:9 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.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

The simplest solution is to see these verses as applying only to the elect. This makes eminent sense and complies with the analogy of the Bible.

Others have said that God's revealed will or His prescriptive will (what we are commanded to do) is to call to repentance but His secret will or decretive will (referring to God's effectual plan, decree) is that only some will actually repent. Those are not wrong answers.

But what do these verses actually say? They teach that God does not delight in anyone dying. God would prefer that all men would repent. That is not really a problem. Faced with the Fall of man and everyone rushing headlong to destruction, God was not and is not willing for everyone to die and so He has decreed to save

some, the elect. Neither of these passages imply a universalistic love of God or salvation. The emphasis is on the need for repentance, not on the love of God.

In **Revelation 22:17** it says: *'he that will, let him take of the water of life freely'*. This is often confused with the hymn that says: *'whosoever will unto the Lord may come'*.

Is this passage a problem for those who embrace the doctrines of grace? Not at all. We have no objection to the teaching that whoever wants to come may come to Jesus. This is entirely Biblical. However, only those that are drawn by God will come. The sinner has no desire for Christ naturally. He wants to stay in enjoyment of his sins. All may come, indeed all are commanded to come; but only those that God empowers actually will come.

John 6 is a clear commentary on this concept.

John 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. 36 But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. 37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. 38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. 39 And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. 40 And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. 41 The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. 42 And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven? 43 Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not

among yourselves. 44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

In John 6:35 there is the promise of Jesus that all who come will never thirst.

In John 6:36 the Lord confirms that, however, people do not believe. Then Jesus explains in John 6:37 and 6:39 that only those whom the Father gives to Jesus will actually come to Him. In John 6:44 it is again forcefully stated that unless the Father draws a person, no one can come at all.

Finally, what about Jesus knocking at the door of our hearts? Is not this a picture of God needing our permission or decision to save us? The passage in question is in Revelation 3:20. *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”*

This statement of the Lord is specifically aimed at Christians not unbelievers. It forms part of a letter addressed to the church at Laodicea. The Lord takes this church to task in the strongest terms but then offers comfort for those who repent. The invitation is directed to those believers who respond to their Lord's chastening. They are not words to be used in Gospel preaching.

Other seemingly universalistic passages are simply explained if read carefully, commentaries will help. They do not constitute any real difficulty.

Doctrines of Grace

- T otal Depravity
- U nconditional Election
- L imited Atonement
- I rresistible Grace
- P erseverance of the Saints

Universalism	False Religion	New Age	Pelagianism
Everyone is saved	A variety of salvations (Buddha, Hinduism Islam etc.)	A variety of ways to salvation Most based on releasing the god in you (Mysticism)	Man saves himself

GOD SAVES TOTALLY	GOD SAVES IN PRINCIPLE ONLY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man is powerless • Grace can't be resisted • Those who are truly converted will persevere to the end in God's grace • Man is depraved and unable • God elects those to be saved in eternity in his good pleasure • Christ's death is for the elect (chosen) only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man co-operates • Man can resist God and reject the Gospel • Salvation can be lost • Man is not totally depraved and unable • God only chooses those whom he sees in the future will respond to the Gospel • Christ's death is for all without exception

GENERAL CALL	EFFECTUAL CALL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To everyone • Is external • Applies law • Command to believe & repent • Results in obligation to the reprobate • Can be rejected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contained within the general call • To the elect • Is inward • Applies grace • Ability to believe & repent • Results in life to the elect • Cannot be resisted

Terms to Define

- **Arminianism.** Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) was a Dutch theologian at the University of Leyden whose teachings challenged that system of theology set forth by John Calvin. Arminianism emphasizes man's free will or the ability to choose and thus to make a decision to be saved.

- **Augustine of Hippo (354-430).** Augustine challenged the teachings of Pelagius.
- **Calvinism.** While Calvinism is associated with the teachings of the French Reformer John Calvin (b. 1509) the system of theology which bears his name is another term for historic Christianity or the doctrines of grace.
- **Doctrines of Grace.** The doctrines of grace refer to the five particular points concerning Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.
- **Pelagianism.** Pelagius was a British monk who appears in history ca.380. Little is known of him after ca. 410. Pelagius promoted asceticism, i.e., withdrawal from the world as a means to holiness and that as a means to justification or righteousness before God. It is likely that Pelagius and his associates were drawn to Rome by Jerome's strongly moralist (c.342-420) preaching. Pelagius himself apparently attracted a following by teaching that humans are not Adam's children, but, like Adam, have the ability to sin or not to sin,

Ironically Pelagius like many in the Reformed faith, was a *creationist* regarding the soul, i.e., he taught each soul is created immediately by God so that it does not participate in original sin. On the sacking of Rome (ca.409-10) by Alaric the Goth, Pelagius went to North Africa, settling in Carthage.

The Pelagians also presupposed that ought equals can, i.e., justice requires that God may only require of us what we are freely able to do. Thus they interpreted passages such as Deut 30.19 to imply that humans must have the ability to will the contrary relative to the divine will.

Deuteronomy 30:19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

- **Universalism.** This theological position teaches that all people shall be saved.