

Doctrine



*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path...
The entrance of Your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple. Psalm 119:105,130*

How Are We Saved?

Part 3 of 3

THEOLOGY

- * Mankind is separated from God by sin and is in need of redemption.
 - * *Romans 3:23, John 3:3*
- * Death entered in to the human existence by Adam and Eve's sin.
 - * *Romans 5:12, Romans 6:23*
- * Salvation by Grace alone, through Faith alone, through Jesus Christ alone.
 - * *Ephesians 2:8, Romans 5:1-2, 9*

DOCTRINE

In this paper we will examine the position of Calvary Old Path with regards to our Soteriology, or how does salvation come to be realized. This topic is also commonly referred to as the Doctrines of Grace, and we have covered two rivaling camps on the topic, namely Calvin and Arminius.

The debate, as we have covered in the first two volumes of this topic revolve around these statements.

1. Man has free will to accept or reject God's provision for salvation.
2. Or does God chooses whom He will save, for reasons known only to Him?

As with all of our topics we do not put forth our positions to engage in argument, but to make our position clear for those attending our fellowship.

The first 3 statements at the beginning of this page help us understand the importance of also knowing how those points work together. How we are saved is a contentious topic in the modern church and has been for centuries.

The topic can sometimes be oversimplified as picking between two camps, John Calvin or Jacobus Arminius.

Pastor Chuck Smith wrote a very important and concise examination of these two views in a booklet entitled: ***Calvinism, Arminianism & The Word of God*** . We encourage anyone reading this paper to read a copy of Pastor Chuck's work as well.

In it Pastor Chuck had this to say:

“Perhaps no issue is as important or as potentially divisive as the doctrine of salvation, reflected in the debate between followers of John Calvin (1509-1564) and those of Jacob Hermann (1560-1609), best known by the Latin form of his last name, Arminius. Since the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century, Christian churches and leaders have disagreed over such issues as depravity, God's sovereignty, human responsibility, election, predestination, eternal security and the nature and extent of the atonement of Jesus Christ.”

If you are familiar with the topic the main issues between the two views are outlined in the term TULIP, popularized by proponents of Calvin's theology. What is generally not known is Arminius also had his teachings defined 5 points as well. Both men, to whose names these positions are credited, did not write the 5 points. They were later presented as such by those who subscribed to their views.

It is an interesting history to read, but the personalities and events are not of primary concern. What does matter is the underlying beliefs of both which so heavily influence the basic belief in how a person is saved.

In the previous two volumes we showed the 5 points associated with the theological positions of Calvin and Arminius. So for sake of space we would refer you to those other booklets.

For our position, we do not assume any person needs to embrace one camp or the other, so we will not put forth our own 5 points. What we will do is explain what we see as the balance, as we see it, between God's sovereignty and man's free will.

Many would argue that those two terms are mutually exclusive and that is our first place of disagreement. Can God allow man to have free will, (ability to choose) without abandoning His sovereignty? (Supreme authority and rule) We believe the answer is yes. God is without question the Supreme authority to whom we must all answer (*Philippians 2:9-11*). Not to Jesus alone, but the Father who sent Him.

At the same time we believe He offers to man the gift of salvation freely and allows man the choice to believe or reject His gracious offer. We see the passages where salvation is the topic as invitation and not decree. For one such example in *Acts 3:17–21*;

¹⁷ *“Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers.*

¹⁸ *But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.*

¹⁹ *Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,* ²⁰ *and that He may send Jesus Christ who was preached to you before,* ²¹ *whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”*

With respect to verse 19 it is either an invitation, or it is a command. To the Calvinist, it is a command for whom only God knows, and they will repent through no choice of their own. Following that belief, those who will not choose to repent are also made to make that decision by God, and suffer eternally.

The Arminius would say Peter’s words are an invitation and man is free to choose to accept the invitation. Those who choose either option will one day stand before God for the choices they have made. In this instance and for this passage we also believe man has choice and free will.

It is important to point out that Old Path does not agree with all of Arminius theology, but on the matter of free will, we do agree. Old Path does not point to Calvin or Arminius as our guide, as we arrive at what we believe, independent of if either of these men ever wrote or even existed. We believe our view is supported in scripture, and we teach accordingly. We also realize proponents of Calvin or Arminius theology would claim the same thing, again we are not concerned to debate against those views.

So as to the points which both camps address. We do believe man is fallen and wicked by nature. We also believe those who are saved are known by God from before creation, but not decreed to be so, as He has given them free will. We believe Jesus dies for all of mankind and salvation is available to all mankind. We believe since man has free will, he can resist the offer of salvation which God extends. We also believe we are secure in Jesus as we abide in Him. Not by works, not by decree, but by faith.

It is this last part which also causes very heated debate in the church. On one side, and I describe the extremes, there are those who believe that since God decrees salvation and it’s irresistible, the believer will continue to believe until the end. Of course nobody can truly be sure of this, ultimately, unless they die in good standing with God. On the other extreme there are those who believe by one’s actions people can fall in and out of grace. So, ultimately, in actuality we do earn salvation by action. This group would say man’s free will allows for them to sin and that sin, if unconfessed will lead to their eternal damnation.

While we believe God gives man free will, day to day failure caused by sin does not exclude anyone from heaven. Since we do not believe we are saved by decree we also do not want to be hardened by sin either.

We believe there are many passages which clearly show a choice is being offered. Such passages either indicate choice or they leave us with but one other option. God gives man hope, and offers of correction, though they will not be able to exercise such choices. If He decides, without man having free will, then He was simply toying with them, since no choice is possible. One such passage would be:

Ezekiel 33:11: ¹¹ Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’

There are many such passages throughout the Old Testament as God’s communication came through messengers of His choosing. God’s communication was to confront sin, explain consequence if warnings were ignored, and then give His people opportunity to repent. It was a repeating cycle with Israel for generations. God does not change and He has been consistent in His engagements with mankind through the ages.

God communicated differently in the New Testament, because the message and audience was much more diverse, but God still gives choices. Thus, there are not the same “Thus says The Lord” types of passages, but no less authoritative are the writings of those in the New Testament.

We fully acknowledge that proponents of the varying views would say we have oversimplify their views. However, we present our analysis from the standpoint of logical conclusions of the two positions, namely, divine decree, or free will.

Back to some examples from the text. The New Testament also has a number of passages which show preaching, the need for salvation, and invitation to consider the matter and then a decision on the part of those hearing.

One such example would be *Acts 17:21-32*. After Paul had preached to the people in Athens he said this, at the close of his preaching,

“³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

If the Calvin view is correct, God would be the cause of their ignorance and also the cause of their repentance, but only for the elect. Paul makes no such argument, but rather makes the observation that now was their time for decision and tells those hearing of their responsibility to a Holy God who has provided the only means of salvation.

So what is the balance for this topic? Is there a middle ground?

We believe there is a middle ground. We do believe God is sovereign (Above all things). We also believe man is endowed with free will. We believe God allows for man to decide, when prompted by the Holy Spirit. We do not believe one earns salvation by obedience, but rather is gifted with salvation by faith. We believe man is saved by faith in Jesus and His finished work. We believe Jesus holds those who are His and we abide in that relationship (*John 15*).

We also believe because one abides, they are secure. Thus the numerous warnings in scripture not to depart. This is the part of the debate where most do not see a possible middle ground between the two views. Is there truth in both views? Yes. In *John 15* we believe this is explained well by Jesus. He uses the word abide 10 times in English translations of the chapter. Abiding is an action. If, as we believe, God gives free will then the action is on our part. Though it seems impossible to the mind of a saved person, free will must be that, free even when it comes to abiding.

This is not to say, as the extreme Arminianists teach, that we fall in and out of salvation by some momentary lapse of sin. What we believe is salvation is of the will, and God has provided the means of salvation in Jesus. His life, death, and resurrection are the means of that salvation.

Another way we can see this expressed is in John chapter 6. This is the chapter in which Jesus teaches one of His I AM statements. In this chapter He says He is The Bread of Life (*John 6:35*). He would continue to speak on this matter and add to the difficulty of the topic. At one point those contending with Him heard Him say this,

John 6:53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

The reaction was immediate and dramatic. We read in verse 66 that many no longer followed Him. They did not ask any further questions, they simply decided this was enough. It is in Peter's reply to Jesus's question, if His disciples would leave as well. Peter spoke for them and said in verse 68-69, ⁶⁸ *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

It is this statement which captures that balance between both sides of the debate. In Peter we do not have a perfect man. He could not fully comprehend what Jesus was teaching, at that moment, but he knew enough to abide.

Some would see that as a matter beyond Peter's ability, as God decreed his action. We are not of that view, we believe man is free to choose, all the way to willfully departing.

Thus we do not believe one can “lose their salvation” as some like to phrase it. That would imply no willfulness, as if anyone would voluntarily lose anything.

This would be a deliberate decision, no matter how foolish the action, or grave the consequence. It is an either/or, if free will is free will, it must by definition work in both directions.

One last thought, there is no fear in this view since Jesus did not cause fear with His teaching in *John 15*. It is the last of His I AM statements. He says in verse 1-5, ¹ *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”*

Our abiding is the essence of our relationship with Jesus. It is an amazing thing to consider His words later in chapter 15, ¹³ *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”*

See our 2 booklets that go with the series:

What is Calvinism? (Part 1 of 3)

What is Arminianism? (Part 2 of 3)



On the Path Discernment Ministry

Discernment is always mentioned in scripture in a favorable light. Discernment was promoted as a way to avoid error and cause the believer to continually be seeking and watching with vigilance. Accordingly, these materials are provided for you in order to assist you in growing in your knowledge and understanding of God's Word. We have taken great care to give a thorough and expansive explanation of the positions of the church.

Calvary Old Path of Cypress

5202 Lincoln Ave.

Cypress, CA. 90630

714 236-1288

Email: discern@oldpath.net www.oldpath.net

These booklets are provided to explain Old Path's teachings on topics of theology and doctrine. Should you have questions on doctrinal matters or would like further clarity on these positions, you can email us and we will assist you by researching the needed matters. However, we do not provide these booklets with the intention of debating.