

CALVINISM and ARMINIANISM -a brief explanation-

“CALVINISM” - The views, in summary, of John Calvin, 16th century reformer and theologian.

Calvinism is a Protestant theological system and an approach to the Christian life. This teaching bears the name of the French reformer John Calvin because of his prominent influence on it and because of his role in the confessional and ecclesiastical debates throughout the 16th century. Today, this term also refers to the doctrines and practices of the Reformed churches of which Calvin was an early leader. Less commonly, it can refer to the individual, biblical teachings of Calvin himself. The system is often summarized in the *Five Points of Calvinism* and is best known for its doctrines of predestination and total depravity, stressing the absolute sovereignty of God.

Five Points of Calvinism

- **"Total depravity"**: This doctrine, also called "total inability", asserts that as a consequence of the fall of man into sin, every person born into the world is enslaved to the service of sin. ... all people by their own faculties are morally unable to choose to follow God and be saved because they are unwilling to do so out of the necessity of their own natures.
- **"Unconditional election"**: This doctrine asserts that God has chosen from eternity (predestination) those whom he will bring to himself not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people; rather, it is unconditionally grounded in God's mercy alone. God has chosen from eternity to extend mercy to those He has chosen and to withhold mercy from those not chosen. Those chosen receive salvation through Christ alone. Those not chosen receive the just wrath that is warranted for their sins against God.
- **"Limited atonement"**: Also called "particular redemption" or "definite atonement", this doctrine asserts that Jesus's substitutionary atonement was definite and certain in its purpose and in what it accomplished. This implies that only the sins of the elect were atoned for by Jesus's death. Calvinists do not believe, however, that the atonement is limited in its value or power, but rather that the atonement is limited in the sense that it is designed for some and not all.
- **"Irresistible grace"**: This doctrine, also called "efficacious grace", asserts that the saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom he has determined to save (that is, the elect) and, in God's timing, overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to a saving faith. This means that when God sovereignly purposes to save someone, that individual certainly will be saved. The doctrine holds that this purposeful influence of God's Holy Spirit cannot be resisted, but that the Holy Spirit, "graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ." (a possible contradiction in "cannot be resisted" and "willingly")
- **"Perseverance of the saints"**: Perseverance (or preservation) of the saints (the word "saints" is used to refer to all who are set apart by God, and not of those who are exceptionally holy, canonized, or in heaven). The doctrine asserts that since God is sovereign and his will cannot be frustrated by humans or anything else, those whom God has called into communion with himself will continue in faith until the end. (eternal security) Those who apparently fall away either never had true faith to begin with or will return.

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“ARMENIANISM” - The views, in summary, of Arminius, 16th century reformer and theologian.

A theological and political movement in opposition to Calvinism, now called "Arminianism", was founded by Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius. and revised and pursued by the Remonstrants*. Arminius rejected several tenets of the Calvinist doctrines of salvation – namely, the latter four of what would later be known as the five points of Calvinism. The term "Arminianism" today often serves as an umbrella term for both Arminius's doctrine and the Remonstrants', but Arminius's followers sometimes distinguish themselves as "Reformed Arminians."

The Remonstrants' doctrine was condemned at the Synod of Dort held in Dordrecht, Holland, in 1618/1619, and followers of either Arminius or the Remonstrants are not generally considered "Reformed" by most Calvinists. Many Evangelical Christians adopted the position advocated by the Remonstrants, and Arminius's system was revived by evangelist John Wesley and is common today, particularly in Methodism (and Wesleyan and Nazarene churches).

*The Remonstrants are the Dutch Protestants who, after the death of Jacobus Arminius, maintained the views associated with his name. In 1610 they presented to the States of Holland and Friesland a remonstrance in five articles formulating their points of disagreement from Calvinism.

The Five Articles of Remonstrance (from Jacobus Arminius)

The Five Articles of Remonstrance contrast with the Five Points of Calvinism on most points.

- Article I disagrees that election into Christ is unconditional. Rather, in this article the Remonstrants assert that election is conditional upon faith in Christ, and that God elects to salvation those He knows beforehand will have faith in Him.
- Article II espouses unlimited atonement, the concept that Christ died for all. This stands in contrast to the limited atonement of Calvinism, which asserts that Christ only died for those God chooses to be saved.
- Article III affirms the total depravity of man, that man cannot save himself.
- Article IV repudiates the Calvinistic concept of irresistible grace, contending that mankind has the free will to resist God's grace.
- Article V, rather than outright rejecting the notion of perseverance of the saints, argues that it may be conditional upon the believer remaining in Christ. The writers explicitly stated that they were not sure on this point, and that further study was needed. The text of the articles is given below.

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THE FIVE ARTICLES of REMONSTRANCE (Jacobus Arminius)

Article I — (Salvation is conditional upon faith in Christ)

That God, by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ, his Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ's sake, and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, shall believe on this his Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith, through this grace, even to the end; and, on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath, and to condemn them as alienate from Christ, according to the word of the Gospel in John iii. 36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," and according to other passages of Scripture also.

Article II — (Christ died for all)

That, agreeably thereto, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins, except the believer, according to the word of the Gospel of John iii. 16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; and in the First Epistle of John ii. 2: "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Article III — (Total depravity of man and man cannot save himself)

That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do anything that is truly good (such as having faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the word of Christ, John xv. 5: "Without me ye can do nothing."

Article IV — (Mankind has the free will to resist God's grace)

That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of an good, even to this extent, that the regenerate man himself, without that prevenient or assisting; awakening, following, and co-operative grace, can neither think, will, nor do good, nor withstand any temptations to evil; so that all good deeds or movements that can be conceived must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. But, as respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible, inasmuch as it is written concerning many that they have resisted the Holy Ghost,—Acts vii, and elsewhere in many places.

Article V — (“backsliding” and “security” may be conditional upon the believer remaining in Christ)

That those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith, and have thereby become partakers of his life-giving spirit, have thereby full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory, it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting

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grace of the Holy Ghost; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends to them his hand; and if only they are ready for the conflict, and desire his help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling, so that they, by no craft or power of Satan, can be misled, nor plucked out of Christ's hands, according to the word of Christ, John x. 28: "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scriptures before they can teach it with the full persuasion of their minds.

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Comparison Chart on the doctrines of Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Arminianism

Topic	Lutheranism (Lutherans)	Calvinism (Baptists, Presb., Dutch Reformed)	Arminianism (Methodists, Nazarenes, Wesleyans)
Human will	Total Depravity without free will until spiritual regeneration	Total Depravity without free will permanently due to the nature of divine sovereignty	Total depravity, with prevenient grace, does not preclude free will
Election	Unconditional election to salvation only	Unconditional election to salvation with those outside the elect foreordained to damnation (<i>double-predestination</i>)	Conditional election on the basis of foreseen <u>faith</u> or unbelief.
Justification	Justification of all people made available at Christ's death ("Just shall live by faith")	Justification is limited to those predestined to salvation, completed at Christ's death	Justification made possible for all through Christ's death, but only completed upon placing <u>faith</u> in Jesus (<i>hypothetical universalism</i>)
Conversion	Monergistic (God working alone), through the means of grace, resistible	Monergistic (God working alone), through the inner calling of the Holy Spirit, irresistible	Synergistic (God / man cooperating), resistible due to the common, sufficient grace of <u>free will</u>
Preservation and apostasy (the refusal to accept beliefs)	Falling away is possible, but reflection on one's faith provides assurance of preservation	Perseverance of the saints: the eternally elect in Christ will necessarily persevere in faith and subsequent holiness until the end. (Eternal Security)	Preservation is conditional upon continued faith in Christ; reflection on one's faith provides assurance (Possibility of "backsliding")