

Are Arminians Saved?

The title of this article could as easily be, “Are Calvinists Saved?” It’s the same issue. The question we are asking is, “What is Saving Faith?” Faith is what we believe to be true about who Christ is, and what he accomplished on the cross. And so, the question might be worded, “What is Saving *Knowledge*?” We want to know if our doctrine, our beliefs, are sufficient to save us; is the object of our faith correct? Apostasy is the point at which our belief departs from the saving knowledge, from the gospel truth. Heresy, on the other hand, is the point at which our knowledge departs from church orthodoxy. It may or may not depart from saving knowledge. For example, rejecting infant baptism might be heresy under the Westminster Confession, but it would not impact a Calvinist’s saving knowledge. In their fine book *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, Robert Peterson and Michael Williams make a curious observation:

The Synod of Dort was right to condemn the Arminian representation of the saving ways of God. Yet we do not think of Arminianism as a heresy or Arminian Christians as unregenerate. You see, calling someone a heretic is serious business. Heresy is not merely doctrinal error; it is damnable error. The heretic so mangles the gospel of Jesus Christ that it no longer communicates the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Heresy is such a corruption of the grace of God in Christ that it invalidates either Jesus as the Savior or grace as the way of salvation. The Arminian tradition does neither.¹

I would think that a couple of theology professors at a leading conservative seminary could distinguish between heresy and apostasy, but apparently not. Arminianism is definitely heresy. It departs from church orthodoxy, as they readily concede. The issue the church has wrestled with for hundreds of years is whether it is also apostasy; and apostasy is what Peterson and Williams have defined here. They believe that Arminianism is not apostasy, and that the content of saving knowledge is restricted to two points: Jesus is the Savior, and grace is the way of salvation. I’m tempted to say that even demons believe these things and tremble...

Orthodoxy or dogma, which is the church’s declaration of truth, should be distinguished from *Scriptural Truth*, which is the bible’s declaration of truth. Obviously Church councils have always tried to ensure that the declared dogma of the Church conforms to Scriptural truth. But sometimes the church goes awry and needs to be corrected, and its teachings need to be realigned with Scripture. That’s what Martin Luther was doing when he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel in 1517. Church dogma had strayed from Scriptural Truth.

Of course, using a phrase like “The Church” is problematic in today’s world. The great confessions of church history were declarations by *state churches*, which thankfully no longer exist. The church, properly speaking, is the gathering of the saints of all ages. But how is such a gathering to speak with one voice? Who will declare dogma on its behalf? Who speaks with authority today? Billy Graham? Pat Robertson? James Dobson? Tim LaHaye? Their personal theology is not our standard of Biblical Truth. The number of books sold lends neither credence nor authority to what was written by its author. The world believes that a declaration by the National Association of Evangelicals is somehow equivalent to a papal bull for Protestants. They have no idea how disjointed and at odds evangelicals are. We have denominational declarations. But, for the most part, these merely repeat or restate the content of one of the historic confessions. We have the declarations of conventions, associations, para-church organizations,

¹ Peterson, Robert A. and Williams, Michael D. *Why I am not an Arminian* (IVP Downers Grove IL, 2004), p. 13.

ministries, and websites – a cacophony of beliefs. Which Church are we speaking of, and which one speaks for the Body of Christ as a whole?

Ecumenicalism will not unite these disparate voices. It will only muzzle them in areas of controversy. Biblical Truth, by definition, is exclusive, controversial, and often offensive. It says that one thing is true, and all other competing points of view are false. Arminianism is heresy because it directly conflicts with church orthodoxy espoused in the confessions of the church. The Council of Dort was determinative on the matter. We have no equivalent body in today's world to speak with authority as to whether Arminianism is a proper expression of Biblical Truth. We must resort to the creeds, confessions, and councils of the past to find our orthodoxy. Measured against that orthodoxy, Arminianism is still a heresy, and will always be a heresy. But it is not apostasy. Apostasy is the abandonment of the principles of Christianity that define God, Man, and Salvation. Thus, apostate individuals are eternally lost. Typical Arminians have *not* abandoned the principles of Christianity. They have only abandoned portions of the declared orthodoxy of the church. These are two very different things.

Because of the stigma of heresy, very few individuals call themselves Arminian. Billy Graham is Arminian, but no one would call him a heretic. Uneasy with Arminianism as a heresy, many in today's church are attempting to legitimize it. Arminians call themselves 3 or 4-point Calvinists. This affords them a cloak of propriety. Then, safe within that fold, they may be embraced in full Christian fellowship. Here is an example from Spurgeon:

There is no soul living who holds more firmly to the doctrines of grace than I do, and if any man asks me whether I am ashamed to be called a Calvinist, I answer—I wish to be called nothing but a Christian; but if you ask me, do I hold the doctrinal views which were held by John Calvin, I reply, I do in the main hold them, and rejoice to avow it. But far be it from me even to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views.

Most atrocious things have been spoken about the character and spiritual condition of John Wesley, the modern prince of Arminians. I can only say concerning him that, while I detest many of the doctrines which he preached, yet for the man himself I have a reverence second to no Wesleyan; and if there were wanted two apostles to be added to the number of the twelve, I do not believe that there could be found two men more fit to be so added than George Whitefield and John Wesley.

The character of John Wesley stands beyond all imputation for self-sacrifice, zeal, holiness, and communion with God; he lived far above the ordinary level of common Christians, and was one "of whom the world was not worthy." I believe there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths, or, at least, cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their Saviour, and are as dear to the heart of the God of grace as the soundest Calvinist in or out of Heaven.²

Spurgeon is absolutely correct when he says, "I believe there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths, or, at least, cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their Saviour." But that's because such persons are elect. Christian salvation is not the result of an intellectual exercise in which we come to the right conclusions about Jesus Christ and God's methodology. It is a sovereign act of grace bestowed on us by God, who has determined in his own will to save some, without regard to their merit, their innate capacity, or their profession of dogma. Election therefore graciously covers children who die in infancy, the mentally impaired, and those who never hear the gospel. They were not

² Excerpt from *A Defense of Calvinism* by C. H. Spurgeon.

chosen at their conversion, nor by their profession of faith (which would be the Arminian view). They were chosen by grace alone. Their profession was merely the instrument by which they accepted the gift which was prepared for them before time began, bestowed on them by the power of God's Spirit, and made effective for them by Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. Christ did not make us salvable. He fully and finally saved us on the cross. *That* is the gospel.

So, are Arminians saved? I believe many are, just as I believe many Calvinists are saved. I cannot determine anyone's salvation. I can only look at some indicators: their profession of faith, the content of their faith (what they believe), and their expression of faith in good works and fruits of the Spirit (Mat 7:16). Beyond that, no one can say with certainty who is and is not saved. It's not our place, and it's not our business. That's the business of God. What is our place, and our duty, is to ensure that the seed we spread is good seed, from the right tree. It is to ensure that those who profess Christ do so for the right reasons, standing on the truth of Scripture, and behaving accordingly. I do not believe that Arminianism is good seed, nor that it is the truth of Scripture. It is heresy, and I believe it is ineffectual *because* it is heresy. But those who profess such views are not lost because of their views. I believe they are misguided, deceived, insecure, and impotent. They have ignored the gospel that was entrusted to them (1Thess. 2:4). Unlike Peterson and Williams, I call them to repent, and to embrace the faith of their fathers. There is no such thing as an alternative truth...

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