

Refuting Arminian Arguments

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What follows is a series of installments which are concerned with arguments traditionally used in defense of the false gospel.

The purpose of this is to help and instruct those who want to be more effective in speaking to others about the truth of God's grace. The goal is not to win an argument for one's self, but to see how the precious truth of the gospel is able to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2Corinthians10:5).

By God's grace, our desire is not to be "right" for our own sakes, but to be zealous for the honor of Christ, and for his glory. God is always right; always true: "Let God be true, and every man a liar!" (Romans 3:4; 2Timothy 2:13).

The false gospel (a.k.a., "Arminianism", "Free-willism", "Pelagianism") is exceedingly wicked. Its refined nature, by which it uses the language of Scripture to support itself and present itself as Christian orthodoxy, makes it many times more insidiously evil and damning than some bizarre new age religious philosophy which openly disavows the Scriptures. It is the consummate heresy, having a form of godliness, but rotten to the core, driven by a premise which is nothing less than the arrogance of the devil: God depends on man. Foreseen human goodness is the basis of God's election. Man is the ultimate reason for his relationship to God.

Those who consciously embrace the evil assumptions of the false gospel, or those who defend those assumptions, are not Christians according to the standard of a true confession set forth in the Bible. In the following arguments and refutations, I will seek to defend this proposition. It is only as the true need for forgiveness is exposed and addressed by the gospel that there is hope for any for salvation. Many have a false security, thinking themselves to be genuine believers in Christ when in fact they are under the dark influence of the false gospel. I pray that as the truth is clarified and the lie of human sovereignty is exposed, some among these will be brought to a true understanding of God's grace.

Of those who trust in themselves for salvation (Arminians), the Heidelberg Catechism says, "They may boast of him in words, but they in fact deny the only Savior Jesus. For one of two things must be true: Either Jesus is not a complete Savior, or those who by true faith accept this Savior must find in him all that is necessary for salvation" (Question #31).

The statement of the Catechism reflects the Biblical antithesis between grace and works. As the Apostle says in Romans 11:5, 6: "Even so then at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." People who embrace the false gospel embrace a doctrine of human works, even as they speak about the grace of God. They must be warned, and called to repentance and true faith.

Many "Calvinists" defend Arminianism as a legitimate expression of biblical Christianity, "rough edges" notwithstanding. By doing so, such "Calvinists", by their tolerance of Arminian doctrine, implicitly endorse and believe it. The sober truth is this: whatever people may call themselves, if they tolerate and endorse the teaching of Arminianism, they lend support to the satanic lie of human sovereignty. When such persons are aware of this grave sin, they need to repent and forsake it. I pray that such repentance will ensue, and that I will continually repent of this sin.

John Owen wrote and preached several hundred years ago. In his age as well, there were some who called themselves “Reformed” and yet tolerated and defended the Arminian gospel as a valid expression of Christianity. Here is what he wrote about one such person:

“The sum of their doctrine in this particular is laid down by one of ours in a tract entitled ‘God’s Love to Mankind,’ etc.; a book full of palpable ignorance, gross sophistry, and abominable blasphemy, whose author seems to have proposed nothing unto himself but to rake all the dunghills of a few of the most invective Arminians, and to collect the most filthy scum and pollution of their railings to cast upon the truth of God; and, under I know not what self- coined pretenses, belch out odious blasphemies against his holy name.” (From John Owen, “A Display of Arminianism”)

By defending the devil’s lie of Arminianism, some people today still continue to “belch out odious blasphemies against his holy name”, as Owen said. May these efforts honor Christ instead.

First, I will state a common argument used to defend the false gospel by people who, though they would say they themselves are not Arminians, would nevertheless defend it as legitimate, and would maintain that Arminians are to be regarded as true Christians.

Then, I will seek to answer the argument.

ARGUMENT #1:

“I can see how a given passage of Scripture can be easily understood by Arminians to mean that free will is necessary for salvation. In fact, there are many passages which, taken at face value, seem to lend themselves to a more ‘Arminian’ understanding. For example, it is easy to see how a passage calling us to ‘believe’ would lend itself to the reasonable conclusion that we have the power to do just that, that we are able to believe, and that belief is not something God does for us, but is something we must do in order to lay hold of the salvation of Christ. I myself am not an Arminian, but I sympathize with them in that the Bible does seem to use very ‘Arminian’ language at times, giving the very clear impression that we must do something to contribute to our salvation, to make it a reality for us.”

Answer: This argument is based on the perversion it tolerates. Consider the following:

Because a person can see how a criminal could think an unlocked door is an open invitation to come in and steal, it does not therefore follow that the purpose for which the door is unlocked is to admit a thief, or that stealing is any less a crime. The assumption behind argument #1 is that there is something legitimate and proper about Arminian reasoning because it appeals to the Bible in support of its position.

Arminian reasoning may indeed use Scripture as endorsement. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Scriptures, taken as a whole and read in context, lend any endorsement to Arminianism. The fact that there is an appeal to Scripture which is sincere is simply no warrant to conclude that the person making the appeal has a legitimate point, or that there is something valid about Arminianism because it is able to cite verses from the Bible to justify its tenants.

The above defense of Arminianism assumes that the legitimacy of Arminianism does not lie necessarily in the conclusions it draws from Scripture (which the tolerant “Calvinist” would say are ultimately misguided and false, but not fatally so), but in the fact that Arminian reasoning uses Scripture. It tries its best to interpret Scripture as it knows Scripture. We can see how a person can draw “Arminian” conclusions from certain passages, the argument goes; thus, Arminianism should not be condemned.

What is implied is as follows: It is not as important that you affirm the truth, the truth that agrees with Scripture, as it is that you TRY HARD at affirming truth as YOU see it, giving it your best shot. This puts you “in the ballpark”.

This notion runs in the opposite direction of the teaching of the Bible, which gives no legitimacy to human sincerity or private judgment. The teaching of the Bible is that all motives are subject to the judgment of the Word of God, (Hebrews 4:12) and further assumes that truth is never recognized as a personal opinion, but is recognized with the conviction given by the God who reveals it. (2Peter 1:20; 1John 2:20)

To imply that a sincere (though misguided and wrong) attempt to understand the Bible is something to be commended is to show disrespect for the clarity of the Bible and wrongful endorsement of religious sincerity.

Consider this: those who accord legitimacy to the Arminian assumptions which are drawn from the statements of Scripture because they can “see how an Arminian could conclude that the Bible is making salvation depend on the condition of our free will” from a given passage must believe that it is indeed a reasonable and proper conclusion to draw, given the evidence. By this, they show they really hold the same assumptions as those they tolerate. They show themselves to believe that human effort, even the sincere human effort of misguided but sincere Arminians, really is decisive for our relationship to God. Thus, the argument is based on the perversion it tolerates.

Persons who use arguments like this one to defend Arminianism may be so bold as to call for “charitable allowances for our Arminian brothers and sisters” because they really looking for justification and tolerance for themselves.

The temptation of Christ by the Devil (Read Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) shows that sincere appeals to scripture, even to support a point that may have an element of truth, are no indication of true faith or of God’s acceptance.

Think of this: The devil used Scripture. He was sincere. He quoted Scripture which he said referred to Christ. Indeed, it DID refer to Christ, so there was an element of truth in the statements he was making about the passages he was quoting, but the truth was twisted in the service of a perverse lie, and an invitation to Christ to worship him.

Because it is possible to see some truth in the passages Satan quoted relative to Christ, should we then say that Satan should be regarded as a brother? No. Satan’s use of the truth of Scripture, because he used it in the service of the perverse lie of creature- worship, was nothing less than an attack on Jesus Christ.

Arminianism uses the truth of Scripture in the service of the perverse lie of creature- worship. According to the Arminian gospel, man is more ultimate, more decisive, and more powerful in determining his relationship to God – than God. In the one thing that matters above all others, the matter of eternal salvation, man is in control, is sovereign, and God depends and waits upon man, according to the Arminian doctrine of “free will”. This is the ultimate creature worship, and all “truth” which is affirmed on the basis of this false conviction is truth twisted in the service of the same lie with which Satan sought to tempt Jesus Christ – by appealing, quite reasonably, it seemed, to Scripture.

Jesus answered the Scriptural appeals of Satan with clear statements, also quoting Scripture, which exposed those appeals as a wresting of Scripture and a twisting of the truth. In other words, in the light of the WHOLE of God’s truth, Satan’s use of the Bible was exposed as a distortion which revealed the

reason for his destruction, and the destruction of all those who distort the Scriptures along with him (See 2Peter 3:16).

We conclude that the reasoning of Argument #1 reveals basic tolerance, and therefore affinity and belief, in the Arminian lie it seeks to defend. It is the same lie with which Satan tempted our first parents in the Garden, and with which he sought to tempt Christ as recorded in Matthew and Luke: the lie that man can sovereignly determine his own destiny, and be “as God”.

The fact is, a heart truly convicted of sin and sensible of need for the forgiveness and righteousness of Christ will never see the command to “believe” as indicating some capacity inherent in itself to grab hold of God. Rather, it will rejoice over such a command as the Word of Life, which brings the life and faith which MUST come from God, as it could not possibly come from a polluted, dead, rebellious sinner. The whole of Scripture bears this out. The word of Christ which attends the command to believe produces the very faith it commands for the lives of God’s elect, and brings hardening to the reprobate. (Romans 10:17; 2Corinthians 2:14-17; Romans 9:18)

ARGUMENT #2

“The doctrine of election is a very important teaching in the Bible, but it is not the gospel as such. A person may believe the simple gospel and have no knowledge of the doctrine of election, and many passages in the Bible, if not most of them, which refer to the gospel, make no mention of election. If election, or believing it, is so essential, then why did not God himself, who gave the Scriptures, tie election more explicitly into the gospel?”

“Don’t get me wrong. I believe in election, and I think it is a wonderful doctrine. I simply do not believe that a full acceptance or understanding of election is necessary for salvation, and I think the fact that the gospel is presented in such simple terms in the Bible, often with no mention of election, bears out my position.

“People who make election a test of fellowship, or suggest that belief in election is necessary for salvation, introduce a new kind of ‘Galatianism’ into the church – they add to the gospel an extra requirement to simple faith, and thus people like this are even – dare I say it – bordering on cultic for making some teaching of the Bible in addition to the gospel an acid test for true Christian belief.

“Yes, election is true, because everything in the Bible is true. It is not essential truth for salvation. It may take a true Christian years, or even a lifetime, to grow into an understanding of election and its implications. Or a Christian may never come to understand or to believe in the doctrine of election. No matter. God will straighten them out when they get to heaven.”

ANSWER: This argument is very common. It is also evil. It reveals an ignorance of the things it purports to understand, and indifference to the very heart of the gospel. This is true, for the following reasons:

First, this argument assumes that the statements in the Bible about the gospel and the explicit references in the Bible to election are unrelated as to their essential meaning and significance, and that they concern issues which have no implications for one another.

This is false, for the issue is not whether the word “election” appears in passages where the “simple gospel” is mentioned; the issue rather is whether the meaning of the word “election” as it is found in the Bible is conveyed in the passages which speak of the gospel, and vice versa.

Let us ask, how does the Bible speak of the significance of God's election, and is this significance, this meaning, the same as that conveyed in the statements in the Bible about the gospel?

We will point out three of many, many passages which speak of the significance of election, the meaning of the election of God: Romans 9:11-13; Romans 11:5, 6, and Ephesians 1:3-14.

In Romans 9:11-13, the Apostle Paul speaks of "the purpose of God in election". This purpose is what God, according to this statement of God's Word, desired to accomplish in his love for Jacob and his hatred for Esau. What is the purpose of God in election, according to Romans 9:12? It is nothing other than the testimony that salvation is "not by works, but by him who calls".

Now, we must ask a question: Does God's purpose that salvation should not be by works (that is, the works of sinful man, the efforts of his own flesh) but instead by Him who calls, have anything to do with the essential meaning and truth of the biblical gospel? To answer "no" to this question is to defy all Scripture, and of each and every place where the gospel is explicitly mentioned in Scripture.

The fact is, salvation by God's grace apart from human works not only has something to do with the gospel, it is the very heart and soul of the gospel, for to proclaim the gospel is to proclaim that forgiveness is by the grace of God alone, apart from human works. Such works cannot merit the grace and forgiveness of God, as they deserve only God's wrath and curse (Romans 1:17, cf Romans 3:19-26; Galatians 2:16, cf. Galatians 3:10, 11; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:3-8).

What the Bible calls "election" in Romans 9:11-13 is the core and essence of the biblical gospel. To believe the gospel for the forgiveness of sins is to renounce one's own righteousness and works, and to trust in the work of God by Jesus Christ.

Therefore, whether you call it believing in the "doctrine of election" or no, everyone who expresses true faith also expresses true understanding and belief in the biblical "doctrine of election".

In Romans 11: 5, 6, the Apostle makes a statement about God's election which indicates a similar correspondence between election and grace. In verse 5, the remnant is chosen according to "the election of grace", or "chosen by grace". In verse 6, election by grace is contrasted with works. The point? If it is not according to the "election of grace", then it is according to works. There is no other alternative. It is election or works. It is grace or works. Why? Because election is the way in which God's grace is expressed. For grace to be grace, it must exclude all human works. Therefore, if God is to be gracious to man the sinner, God must choose him, for man cannot choose himself – this would be works. If God does not choose man in an act of Divine discrimination, then there is no grace, for the alternative to God's election of man is man's election of himself, a denial of grace in favor of human works.

Because God's election and God's grace cannot be separated, to believe in God's grace in the biblical sense is to believe in the "doctrine of election". If "the doctrine of election" is not "truth essential to salvation", then the "doctrine of grace" is not truth essential to salvation.

Must a person pronounce the phrase, "the doctrine of election" in order to be a Christian? Many who oppose and mock a concern for the biblical understanding of grace often characterize the whole discussion as an insistence on pronouncing the right doctrinal formula. In fact, the issue has nothing to do with their ability to pronounce the phrase, the doctrine of election, or to spell predestination. Must a person believe "the doctrine of election" to be a Christian? The answer is yes, as surely as one must believe and accept God's grace to be a Christian. To cut election away from grace is to have "grace" which is no grace. To cut election away from the gospel is to have a "gospel" that is no gospel, for a gospel without grace is another gospel from the Biblical message (Galatians 1:6-10).

In Ephesians 1:3-14, what now should be a familiar note is sounded again – and again – with a remarkable statement which says the election of God is undertaken “to the praise of his glorious grace” (verse 6) and “to the praise of his glory” (verses 12 and 14). Here, in addition to the clear identification with election in terms of grace apart from works, is a statement that God explicitly intends his election to be revealed in the gospel, for the gospel itself is the message of God’s glorious grace, the revelation of his glory (see Exodus 33:18- 34:7).

In other words, not only is the significance of election tied to the heart of the gospel message, but the work of God in election the only foundation of the message, and the praise which it brings to his Name. Election is the divine logic of the gospel, for which God is to be praised, and by which he intends to secure praise and honor to himself alone.

Only a person who is completely blind to the true grace of God would dare to suggest in the light of the foregoing statements of Scripture that election is not explicitly tied to the gospel. To argue, then, that because the word “election” is not used, the “doctrine of election” is not present in passages which command repentance and faith in the message of God’s forgiveness, is to show wicked prejudice against the meaning and significance of election and to attempt to make the life and death issue of God’s gospel a debate about words, subjecting God to a childish rule that says: “If election is not mentioned here, it is not taught here.”, as if air and water needed to have a sign on them for us to recognize them, to breathe, and to drink. Truly, the prejudice against God’s election must be great indeed to resort to such foolish terms to which it is subjected – and made to disappear.

The point? Separate “the doctrine of election” (a phrase, by the way, which suggests that election is a topic for the detached impractical speculation of theologians, and is not used in the Bible) from the gospel, and you accomplish nothing more than to demonstrate that you are wholly ignorant of both election and the gospel, and you condemn and shame yourself in a wicked act which makes a word game out of the salvation and love of Almighty God.

Second, the argument suggests that insistence on belief in election is “adding another requirement to the gospel” as if belief in the gospel of salvation by grace apart from works and belief in “the doctrine of election” were two different things. From what has already been said, this line of reasoning builds on a lie, and so no matter how pious and “pure” it sounds in its ominous warning about a “new Galatianism”, it can never be more than a fine sounding lie.

But more must be said about this point, for it shows something about the assumptions of those who resort to it: For people who use the argument that election is “adding” to the gospel, they must have a concept of the gospel that is “election free”, i.e., that is abstracted from the clear biblical meaning of the gospel as a revelation of God’s righteousness for sinners who have no ability to save themselves. They must be able, in their own minds, to understand human faith and the apprehension of forgiveness in abstraction from the sovereign will of God in giving these blessings (which is the “doctrine of election”). They must be able, having dismissed the sovereign will and gift of God as the basis of the gospel, to see its whole foundation and logic in terms of something else – or rather, someone else – than the Sovereign God.

Who might that be?

The answer is inescapable: Sovereign Man. This is blasphemy. Using the line of reasoning which suggests that insistence on belief in the doctrine of election is a kind of “Galatianism” and a “cultic” preoccupation with extraneous doctrinal “additions” to the truth of the gospel is blasphemy on the order of the insult to the Spirit of grace which was evident in the Pharisee’s ascription of the works and miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ to the devil (Matthew 12:24ff).

If anyone reading this has used this argument, or has been under the influence of this devilish reasoning, I call upon you to throw yourself before God and plead for his mercy – or you will eternally perish.

Thirdly and finally, we respond to the point of this argument which suggests that many Christians never come to accept the “doctrine of election” for years, or even their entire earthly lives, and are nevertheless true Christians, on their way to heaven.

Having established, as we have, that belief in the gospel and belief in the “doctrine of election” can not be separated if we are going to define faith, the folly and arrogance of this point can be illustrated by substituting the word “gospel” for “election”. Consider the following sentence:

“Yes, the gospel is true, because everything in the Bible is true. It is not essential truth for salvation. It may take a true Christian years, or even a lifetime, to grow into an understanding of the gospel or its implications. Or, a Christian may never come to understand or believe the gospel. No matter, God will straighten them out when they get to heaven.”

A person who believes and teaches this wicked nonsense is ignorant of the gospel, and, if they do not repent of their sin against the grace and heart of God, will undoubtedly be among those who are “straightened out” in the sense of Matthew 7:21-23.

This is not a game. Those who defend the false gospel, while saying they themselves are “Reformed”, express a wickedness far in excess of the ranting of people more explicitly identified with the lie such “Reformed” people endorse in their fine sounding arguments.

ARGUMENT #3:

“All of our judgments about the truth are affected by the fact that we continue to struggle with remnants of the sin nature – even in our understanding of spiritual truth. The “perfect gospel” is known only to God. We may have a good understanding of the truth of God’s grace, and that understanding may grow until we die and go to heaven; but our understanding will never be perfectly clear and complete until the resurrection. Therefore, we should not be quick to judge that people with an “Arminian” understanding of the gospel are not true Christians. Simply because we may have accepted the doctrines of grace does not give us the right to conclude that those who have not are not believers. Indeed, there may be some matters of truth that they see more clearly than we, and we should be willing to learn from them, as well as share the more consistent understanding of God’s grace we have been fortunate enough to have learned as Reformed Christians. It is the height of arrogance to claim some kind of infallible certainty which assumes a sinlessly perfect knowledge of the truth. Those who imply that Arminians are not “true Christians” need a good dose of humility, and should take the log out of their own eye before they try to become ‘truth police’ and remove the doctrinal speck from their brother’s eye.”

ANSWER: As with all arguments which seek to defend the lie of the false gospel, this defense bears earmarks of the evil it endorses. Arminianism is the conviction of human sovereignty. The basic skepticism of argument #3 assumes human sovereignty in the matter of knowledge and truth, and calls this assumption ‘humility’.

In a nutshell, argument #3 makes the point that one can not have an infallible conviction about truth; therefore, one should temper the judgments he makes about the doctrinal claims of someone else with the understanding that “nobody’s perfect”.

This line of reasoning is consistently opposed in the Bible. Skepticism about truth is only possible if the assumption is granted that “truth” depends on us, and our interpretive faculty makes truth what it is: “We own our lips; who is our master?” (Psalm 12:4).

According to the Bible, “truth” does not depend on us, and we do not create truth by the power of our own minds. Rather, truth depends on the revelation of God, and he has created all reality by His own Word. God is able to reveal himself clearly and unambiguously to his creatures, and God will judge according to the standard of his truth (Prov.2:6; Isaiah 45:19; Psalm 96:13; Psalm 36:9; John 14:6; John 18:37; 1John 2:20, 21).

There are at least three points at which argument #3 is exposed as hypocritical and false in the light of the Scriptures:

First, argument #3 must exempt itself of its own point in order to make its case. Essentially, argument #3 is stating that all judgments about truth are “tainted” by the sinful nature, and therefore can not be held with any but the relative degree of certainty which is willing to grant the contrary point out of a “humble” admission that it does not have enough certitude to exclude opinions which take exception to it. In order to say with conviction that truth can not be known with certainty, argument #3 must assume the kind of certainty for itself it claims can not exist for an understanding of the gospel. Otherwise, it would have to include a disclaimer like, “Of course, because this argument is being formulated by a sinner, it could be totally wrong”, thus conceding the ultimate skepticism about truth it endorses.

And it is important to note how argument #3 exempts itself. Having stated with certainty that the remnants of sin and the sinful nature prevent us from being certain about truth, argument #3 becomes a claim to sinless perfection – for itself. Another way of saying it is that argument#3 defends “humility” on the basis of self-righteousness.

The fact that argument #3 is an expression of the “arrogance” it condemns recalls the statement of the Apostle Paul in Romans 2:1ff.: “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?”

It is especially noteworthy that the passage just cited refers to the truth of God as that which God will use to condemn those who deny it in their self righteous hypocrisy.

Second, argument #3 implies that conviction about the truth of the gospel is the work of man. Because it begins with the assumption that the certainty in view is something we generate within ourselves to a greater or lesser degree, it takes the claim to certain conviction as a statement of overweening pride, as though the one making the claim were pointing to a greater level of achievement than most people are able to muster.

By viewing the issue on these terms, argument #3 shows that this is the assumption it has about certainty – that it is something mediated through our own ability; that truth is subject to human sovereignty.

The Bible exposes this assumption as false. Conviction about the truth of the gospel is not the result of man’s work, but of the work of God. (See 1Cor. 2:12; 12:3; John 16:8-11) According to the Bible, God gives a sure understanding of his truth because it is not possible for us to know truth apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God’s elect (1John 2:26, 27). It is precisely because we are not,

on account of our sin and wickedness, able to know the truth of the gospel by beginning with ourselves, that we require the illumination and the conviction which only comes from God as a gift of his grace.

God does not give a foggy, ambiguous conviction about truth. He speaks with a clear voice, and does not leave up to our own imagination or private interpretation what he says. He grants, by the power of his own almighty hand, the ability to distinguish good from evil, righteousness from un-righteousness, truth from error. The conviction God gives about the truth of the gospel is clear and solid. It could be no other. Having shed the blood of his Son to secure the lives of his elect people, God does not leave the apprehension of this precious and glorious salvation up to the “sinfully tainted” ability of the very people who, without the illumination and wisdom he gives, are hopelessly blind to their need for forgiveness. Instead, he grants discernment and wisdom as a fruit of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the lives of those he claims by the Word of Truth, the gospel of their salvation. (Hebrews 1:1-4; 2Peter1:20, 21; 2Timothy 3:15, 16; Ephesians 1:13, 14)

In sum, those who deny that certain conviction of the truth is possible reveal the assumption of human sovereignty where understanding the gospel is concerned. Therefore, they also deny that the knowledge of the truth – and ability to confess it – is the gift of God. If they protest and say that they DO believe that the knowledge of the truth IS the gift of God, and then proceed to say that such knowledge is “sinfully tainted” and therefore uncertain, they imply that God’s gift is dependent on the “interpretative grid” of the sinful creature to whom he gives it, and thus man is sinfully sovereign over the good and perfect gift of God, rendering it practically irrelevant and non-existent except in theory.

In either case, those who use the evil logic of argument #3 trap themselves in their own net, and worship their own net notwithstanding. (Habakkuk 1:16). They show that they believe the knowledge of the truth that brings the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to the elect of God is something that depends on us, and is created by us, and because “nobody’s perfect” we should “go easy” on someone who “doesn’t have it quite as right as we do”. This, in the light of what the Bible says about our folly and inability to know anything good apart from the work of God, is incalculable pride, and the “humility” bred by ‘the certain conviction of uncertainty’ is nothing less than the false humility of self righteousness.

Thirdly, argument #3 shows itself to believe lie it seeks to defend by implying that the “Arminian understanding” of the gospel is incidental to the gospel, and is, at worst, a matter of misguided emphasis on points which are shared by those with an understanding of the “doctrines of grace”.

That misguided emphasis is “chalked up” to the inherent flaws of the ‘sinfully tainted’ view of reality we all supposedly share with Arminians. Simply put, the implication of argument #3 is that the difference between an “Arminian understanding” and the understanding of those who believe the “Reformed Faith” is of no real consequence, and is made only on the basis of a myopic concern for theological precision foreign to the realities of everyday life. Of course, this kind of dismissive opinion of the difference between Arminian free-willism and the “doctrines of grace” can only exist where the one holding this opinion has made peace with Arminian doctrine as something that is not all that bad.

Is such an opinion justified in the light of the teaching of the Bible? To answer this question, we must remind ourselves that the fundamental assumption of Arminian doctrine is that of inherent human righteousness and sovereignty. The fundamental conviction which supports all of “Arminian” theology is that God’s relationship to man depends upon man. In specific, “Arminian” theology shamelessly asserts that the reason for God’s election is found in the quality of moral discrimination man inherently possesses, and that the “free will” of man is the necessary element without which the salvation and forgiveness of God would not exist. Thus, God’s relationship to man is wholly dependent upon man, and his “gift” of salvation is really a payment in recognition of the inherent value of man’s moral capacity.

It is not possible to imagine greater blasphemy against God.

To say that my inherent capacity for moral discrimination is the ultimate reason for my relationship to God is to say that my righteousness is the reason for my forgiveness, and that the blood of Christ was shed on the cross as a tribute to my moral power rather than as an act of divine necessity on account of my cursed inability and un-righteousness (contrast with Galatians 2:21). To say, and to believe such vile filth, is to confess a gospel that is diametrically opposed to the gospel of the Bible (Romans 11:6; Galatians 1:6-10).

But there is something even worse, even more grossly wicked, than this: It is to profess belief in the unqualified grace of the “Reformed Faith” and knowledge of the tenants of Arminianism and say, with no qualms of conscience, that the difference between the two is only a matter of emphasis, or of greater or lesser consistency in affirming essentially the same truth.

The darkest and hottest places in hell will undoubtedly be reserved for those who defend blasphemy against God while professing his “grace” in the same breath, who “turn the grace of God into a license for immorality. “ (Jude 4, 12, 13) To commit blasphemy is terrible, and damning. To defend blasphemy in the light of the truth is far, far worse. It would be better for such persons if they had never been born (Matthew 18:6-9).

In conclusion, argument #3, by dismissing the differences between an “Arminian understanding” and the “doctrines of grace” as incidental to the essential point of the gospel and the unity which should exist among “Christians” reveals belief in the lie while standing on the truth. Only if you believe in a gospel devoid of true biblical grace can you say that the differences between what the Canons of Dort call the “error out of hell of Pelagius” and the “Reformed Faith” are incidental and matters of degree, of emphasis, of greater or lesser consistency.

Therefore we respond to the point of argument #3 by saying that it is the height of arrogance NOT to have a certain conviction of the truth of the gospel, because to say otherwise is to assume human sovereignty over the one thing that matters above all: the knowledge that leads to eternal life. We cannot do this and confess that which the Bible calls the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. The reason we have a certain conviction about the truth of the gospel is because we have come to renounce our own wisdom and righteousness, and receive the knowledge of the truth from God as the poor beggars we are. The knowledge he gives contains not one hint of encouragement to qualify or “adjust” the grace of his salvation according to our sinful preferences. Beggars can not be choosers. To be a chooser is to deny you are a beggar. If any who are reading this have fallen into the pit of darkness represented in argument #3, I urge you to change your mind about the way you have trifled with God’s grace and truth and run to him in repentance. Perhaps he will receive you, before it is too late.

ARGUMENT #4:

“If Arminianism is so evil, why did many Reformed believers start their Christian lives as Arminians, as Christians who believed in “free will”? I myself was a believer in “free will” Arminianism for years, and it was a long and painful journey for me to finally see the biblical basis for the doctrines of grace.

“All those years, I read my Bible, prayed, and sought the salvation of my friends and loved ones, just as I do now. My transition to Calvinism was somewhat reluctant, but the inevitable result of Christian maturity, good Reformed books, and the patience and godly example of Reformed believers who did not castigate me for my free will beliefs but encouraged me to see the greater richness and deep biblical truths of Reformed doctrine.

“I was loved into the Reformed Faith; not condemned into it. People like John Pedersen, instead of showing compassionate acceptance to those with deficient doctrinal understanding, attack them as enemies of Christ and alienate them, proving that he cares more for artificially rigid doctrinal precision than for the souls of people. Actually, for all his concern about doctrine, Pedersen is really doctrinally haywire, because the end result of proper doctrine should be love. Pedersen’s approach is anything but loving, and therefore his whole doctrinal position is wrong, no matter how concerned he may be about the ‘truth’ as he calls it.”

Answer: By this time, a pattern should be emerging. A principle of all arguments in defense of the false gospel is that those who defend Arminianism show essential belief in what they defend. This argument is no exception. The basic points are as follows:

First, because many “Reformed” believers began their Christian lives as believers in the “free will understanding” of salvation as taught by Arminianism, it can not be distinguished from the “Reformed Faith” as something evil, but as a less consistent and immature expression of the faith which is most biblically expressed in Reformed theology.

Second, this view teaches that love and tolerance are the key elements in ministry to those with “Arminian” assumptions. The idea is that people are more apt to listen to you and even agree with you if you treat them with acceptance and love, affirming them where they are, so to speak.

Third, this view sees those (like Pedersen) who regard Arminianism and the Reformed faith as two different gospels as fixated on artificially rigid doctrinal hair- splitting which sacrifices the lives of people on the altar of being right, or values winning an argument about “truth” over showing love.

The preceding points really tie Argument #4 together, and each is related to the others. Essentially, each point is a different way of granting legitimacy to Arminianism as a valid expression of the Christian faith, and a different way of saying that “Arminian” believers are true Christians who mean well and are a little confused.

Everything in argument #4 depends on the sacrosanct position that Arminians are true, biblical Christians, including the person formulating the argument. Challenge and expose that position as false, and the whole argument disappears, because no matter how articulate the defense, it would be nullified by the falsehood of its premise.

For example, imagine the same argument just stated being used in defense of the proposition that practicing, unrepentant adulterers are true Christians. What would happen if someone said as follows?: “If adultery is so evil, why did so many Reformed believers start their Christian lives as adulterers, as people who believed in ‘free love’? I myself was a practicing adulterer for years, and it was a long and painful journey for me to finally see the biblical basis for monogamy.

All those years, I read my Bible, prayed, and sought the salvation of my friends and loved ones, just as I do now. My transition to biblical monogamy was somewhat reluctant, but the inevitable result of Christian maturity, good Reformed books, and the patience and godly example of Reformed believers who did not castigate me for my open practice of adultery with numerous women but instead encouraged me to see the greater richness and deep biblical truths supporting monogamy as the preferred alternative.

I was loved into the same bed as my wife, not condemned into it. Persons like John Pedersen, instead of showing compassionate acceptance of those who may not be ready to give up sexual orgies with their

neighbor's wife, attack them as enemies of Christ and alienate them, showing more of a concern for artificially rigid doctrinal adherence than for the souls of people."

A person using this kind of argument would obviously be considered, by their own words, someone who has no understanding of the sinfulness of sin or of the righteousness of Christ which is the ground of true forgiveness. He would be exposed as someone who essentially believed that adultery, while not preferable, is not all that bad, even a "step in the right direction", a start on the road which eventually leads to a change of mind about adultery as the option of preference, to monogamy and faithfulness.

Anyone who began with such an assumption about adultery, or murder, or lying, etc. would not be seen as credible in his view of a "non-adulterous" state as the preferential position. It would be obvious to all that he does not believe adultery is wrong at all; that it is simply not preferred. Therefore he would still be regarded as an adulterer, even though he is not actively practicing it at the moment, and he could be expected to defend the actions of others who believe the same way he does.

He would be seen as a person who does what is right not out of a sense of compelling principle, but out of a preference which readily agrees with the proposition that adultery, murder, or lying are really not all that bad, just not the best.

Indeed, he would be seen as a person who stands on adultery, murder, or lying in order to do what is right, and affirms what is "right" with a debt of gratitude for the state of adultery, or the murder, or falsehood, that brought him to that affirmation. Someone who used this kind of argument would be immediately exposed and rejected as a heretic, a person who "changes the grace of God into a license for immorality and denies Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (Jude 4).

Arminianism is spiritual adultery. The entire assumption of the false gospel of Arminianism is that of human sovereignty and divine dependence on the will of man for salvation and forgiveness. Otherwise, it would not be Arminianism. Insofar as it can be distinguished as Arminianism, what makes it distinctive is its premise of human sovereignty ("free will") and inherent human righteousness ("foreseen faith").

Whereas the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ's death on the cross was necessitated out of the fact that salvation could not be gained by human work or righteousness (Isaiah 59:15-20; Galatians 2:21; Titus 3:5), Arminianism actually grounds salvation ultimately in the work of man, asserting that God's actions toward men are indiscriminate and that the difference between those who belong to God and those who do not is not found in God, who treats all men the same and desires equally that all men should come to him, but is found in man, and his sovereign free will. In the face of the biblical statements about the horrible judgment that fell on Christ and the purpose of this work on the cross to secure the salvation of his elect people, such an assertion is consummate perversion, and gross evil. It is religious evil...

In view of the above, the following concluding points can be made:

Argument #4 depends on the unchallenged assumption that there is no essential difference between Arminianism and the Reformed Faith. The assumption is simply a lie. Therefore everything built upon it is built on a rotten foundation, and the whole argument is false and also destructive to the degree it draws adherents to it.

By expressing the conviction that "free will Arminianism" and the "Reformed Faith" are two versions of the same thing, distinguished as a more or less biblically consistent rendition of the same belief, the transition from Arminianism to Calvinism is seen by this argument as a transition from one seat to another on the same bus.

For the person making the transition this way, it is indeed a change from one seat to another on the same bus. The seat may read “the Reformed Faith”, but the issue is not the seat at all, but the bus. If you sit in the “Reformed Faith” seat on an Arminian bus, you are just riding more comfortably in the same direction, and upheld by the same superstructure, and powered by the same engine, as all the “Free will” seats. I say this to such a person: No wonder you get along with all the other “free will” passengers so well. You are one of them. You may have a form of godliness, but you deny the power of godliness (2Timothy 3:5).

This leads to the final point. If the “Arminian” bus is headed for a fatal precipice, and I can see it as one who is “Reformed”, am I showing love to the people on the bus by smiling and waving them along? Or should I not warn them of their grave danger, insisting that they continue only at the peril of their souls? If they do not agree with me that their course is indeed a perilous one, how could they do other than see my earnest warnings as condemning, harsh, and un-loving?

They may be headed for a picnic on their nice bus, and I want to spoil their picnic. I can see how if I came on their bus to warn them with the urgency warranted by their peril and they did not believe me, they would want to throw me off the bus as a disruptive, crazy, kook who is trying to sow discord among the passengers on the bus and create unnecessary speculation as to their destination.

I am compelled to warn those under the evil spell of the Arminian lie of their grave danger. This is the only loving thing to do for the sake of the elect who may need to be rescued from the darkness of religious wickedness, and it is the only thing I can do for the sake of God and his purposes in hardening those who refuse to accept the warning. It is the only course allowed by my conscience in view of the peril of many who walk in the dark shadows of “free will Arminianism” and the even darker places where “free will Arminianism” is seen as the same gospel (though less consistent) as the “Reformed Faith”.

Argument #4 is so widespread, that the implications in view of the above conclusions are ominous. Many, if not most ministers and lay people would agree with Argument #4 as I have stated it, and I am not prepared to say if many would be convinced by the response to it. Certainly only God can open the eyes of those in darkness.

Nevertheless, the fact that so many would agree with the reasoning of the argument portends a time of great darkness, perhaps greater than the world has ever known.

May God bring his truth to light!

ARGUMENT #5:

“Doctrinal rigor does not save; Christ saves. There is a difference between preaching orthodoxy and preaching Christ. People are more than repositories of theological information. Social, emotional, cultural, and even intellectual factors may lend themselves in varying degrees to a lack of absolute understanding or conformity to statements of biblical truth; a Procrustean demand for absolute conformity to doctrinal propositions as a condition for the judgment of charity about one’s profession of faith is like assuming someone is guilty until proven innocent, and tends toward fixation on a few doctrinal shibboleths instead of a focus on Christ as he is revealed in the whole council of God. As we preach Christ from all of Scripture, the true biblical basis for the theological affirmations of the Reformed Faith will become increasingly clear to people over time, and they will affirm them as a result of true Pastoral care and feeding rather than a “believe-it-or-else” demand coming from an overweening zeal for “correct theology” which is both divorced from its biblical context and devoid of true loving concern.”

ANSWER: The better and more reasonable arguments in support of Arminian tolerance are stated, the more evil they become. This argument is a good example. It sounds good. It makes some valid points. It has a nice “tone”. It is nevertheless a defense of the false gospel.

Here is why:

First, it assumes that it is appropriate to think that doctrine and the person of Christ can be separated. This assumption is based on an accepted teaching common among evangelicals, namely, that there is a discordant separation between the heart and the mind that accounts for the fact that many people have problems expressing with their mouths what they “really” believe in their hearts.

This separation of the heart and the mind is often cited to account for both “dead orthodoxy” and “lively un-orthodoxy”. A person with a dead orthodoxy is seen to have “head knowledge” of the gospel which is not matched by “heart knowledge,” meaning that while they can tell you all about Christian doctrine, they show by their lives they really don’t believe what they affirm.

On the other hand, a person with a “lively un-orthodoxy” is seen to have a zeal for the Lord and a love for the Lord which shows they really belong to him, but they can’t express this zeal in correct theological language. They supposedly have “heart knowledge” without adequate “head knowledge”.

Some Bible passages cited to support the idea of having head knowledge without heart knowledge might include Luke 6:46ff and James 2:18ff. In the Luke passage, Jesus says, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do the things which I say?” The implication is that it is possible for someone to have correct doctrine but to show that they do not have a heart for what it is they affirm. Or, James is similarly cited.

The problem with appealing to these passages is that the appeal misses the point. The point is that there is no real true confessing of Jesus Christ as Lord if his authority is not obeyed (Luke) and there is no true confession of faith without the works which are the true evidence of it (James). Rather than supporting the idea that there is a separation between the heart and the mind, these passages refute it, because they show that the confession should find agreement in the life.

On the other hand, passages cited to support the notion of a “lively un-orthodoxy” might include Mark 9:24 and Acts 18:26. In the Mark passage, the man cries out, “Lord I believe; help my unbelief”. In Acts, Apollos is seen as receiving more accurate instruction in the way of God. The appeal to these passages might suggest that the individuals cited were giving evidence of true belief in God without adequate knowledge, and even confessing this to be the case. As some might suggest, the people in these passages supposedly had a “heart knowledge” without adequate “head knowledge”.

But, just as first passages cited do not support a “dead orthodoxy”, these passages do not support “lively un-orthodoxy”. In Mark, the man, in confessing his faith, acknowledges his unbelief and requests the help of Jesus Christ. This is far different from confessing something that is un-orthodox with a “good heart”. This is acknowledging a lack of faith, even in the weak affirmation of faith, which, in the light of the request for help in the face of unbelief, is also a confession as to the source of belief.

In Acts, the account of Apollos indicates that his understanding of Jesus Christ was not complete, because he knew only the baptism of John. This does not mean that what he did know or confess was untrue. There is a difference between confessing something that requires more clarification and a fuller explanation and confessing something that is not true. In the case of the former, one’s confession can be orthodox, but lacking in fullness. In the case of the latter, the confession is false; it is a confession which must be exchanged for a true confession.

Neither passage supports the idea that a person can be flying the colors of a false or un-orthodox confession over a good heart, a zealous and sincere heart which should be judged as truly Christian.

If anything, they support the opposite point, because especially in the Acts passage, we see that Apollos willingly received instruction in the way of God more accurately, indicating that he did not oppose, but welcomed such teaching. This showed that it was compatible with what he already believed, and was a fuller expression of what he already confessed.

While the separation of the heart and the mind is accepted evangelical teaching, the Bible simply does not support it.

Indeed, the Bible consistently teaches that what is in the heart will be expressed in the life, in the confessions and the concerns of those who hold to certain heart-assumptions (James 3:10-12; Romans 10:9, 10). In the same way, what is expressed with the tongue, revealing the thinking of a person, is always an indication of what comes from the heart. The mind is therefore an aspect of the heart rather than a separate entity from the heart.

The Lord Jesus Christ pointed out that “it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:24). Speech and the meditation of the heart are mentioned synonymously in Psalm 19:14: “May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer”

In Romans 10:1ff, the heart and the mind are joined together without separation in the statements of the Apostle about hearing and believing the message of the gospel. The whole point about justifying faith demands the premise that the confession of the mouth (requiring the use of the mind) expresses the motive of the heart.

To return to the argument, the separation between the heart and the mind is here being represented as a separation between doctrine and Christ. What is implied is that doctrine is the concern of abstract intellectual speculation and “Christ” embraces the person in their full range of experience, including the intellect and more besides.

But just as the Bible never separates the heart from the mind (confession), the Bible never separates doctrine from Christ. According to the Bible, all doctrine reveals Christ, and Christ can never be understood or known at all apart from revelation. Indeed, the fact that the Apostle Paul speaks of preaching a “another Jesus” and a “different gospel” in the same context in 2Corinthians 11:4 indicates that preaching Christ and preaching doctrine were one and the same thing, for the issue is not whether you say the name, “Jesus”; the issue is the way you represent him doctrinally that determines whether the true Christ or “another Jesus” is being proclaimed.

Moreover, Jesus himself spoke of “false Christs” in Mark 13:22. In addition, the statements in 1John 4:1 call upon believers to distinguish between confessions which acknowledge Jesus as having come in the flesh and those which do not.

It is clearly implied that confessions which speak of Jesus but deny the true significance of his life or work are really not speaking of Jesus at all, but a person other than Christ. Thus to preach Christ is to preach true doctrine concerning him, for it is only by the true doctrine that he is revealed as the Christ of God in the true and saving sense.

Thus, to say that Christ and orthodox doctrine concerning him can be separated is to give place to the idea that there is some kind of “whole person encounter” with God which is not explained in doctrinal terms, and this is nothing more than the spirit of the age, but it is not biblical Christianity. There is no true doctrine or orthodox teaching without Christ being at the center and forefront of it, and there is no understanding of Christ that is outside the province of biblical, and therefore doctrinal, explication.

It is true indeed that “people are more than repositories of doctrinal information”, and this characterization of the viewpoint of one who maintains the absolute importance of doctrine is nothing more or less than a slur which has the effect of casting ridicule on such a viewpoint. It is also a way of diminishing the value of the true confession next to additional factors which supposedly justify a confession that is “true” though marred by the unavoidable presence of those factors.

The real issue remains, and though annoying to the ears of those who want to bury the truth of the gospel in fancy psychological distinctions, it is simply this:

“Is the gospel clear?”

If one answers “yes” to this question, a second question follows: “If the gospel is clear, and is understood by the power of the Holy Spirit (See 1Corinthians 2:14; 1John 2:20) does this message encourage or exclude Arminian assumptions about it?”

We maintain that the Arminian assumptions of human sovereignty and inherent moral goodness can not occupy the same space as a gospel which asserts the absolute sovereignty of God, and the total depravity of man apart from the work of divine grace. These assumptions are not just “extra baggage”; they are excluded by what the gospel does teach.

Therefore, it is not “overly rigorous” to say that believing your salvation is a work of God for his glory can’t occupy the same space as a conviction that understands salvation to be a work which ultimately depends on man, and tends toward the glory of man. The premise of the false gospel of Arminianism is false and evil in the light of our great need for forgiveness, and our helplessness to secure that forgiveness by our own strength.

The idea of being “overly rigorous” suggests “going too far” with something. How does one “go too far” in insisting that salvation must be acknowledged as a miracle of God, and can not be confessed as a work which depends upon man?

The idea of being “overly rigorous” suggests that you do have some rigor just enough. No more. Not too much.

How much rigor is enough? For example, must we insist that the forgiveness of God cannot be defined in terms of conditions within us which make that forgiveness real, or should we simply suggest that this would be a good idea, without insisting that this must be the case?

If we simply suggest it would be a good idea, are we not essentially saying that it does not really matter, if it must be “pushed”? If this is so, is it not something that belongs to the realm of personal preference, and not essential, objective necessity?

To the degree that we see it as a personal preference, the confession of doctrinal truth is according to our own judgment, and not according to the essential judgment of Scripture. It is a strong opinion, but no more than that. We can not call it the absolute truth of God.

Strong opinion is nothing more than the achievement of man. The message of the Bible does not rest on our strong opinion for its truth, but on the testimony of the truth about itself.

The only way that the opening sentence of the argument in question could have validity is on the assumption that by the phrase “doctrinal rigor” the intended idea is “strong human opinion”. What is remarkable is that by separating “doctrinal rigor” from Christ, this argument appears to associate doctrine with opinion rather than saving truth.

The second way that this argument defends the false gospel is that it frames the position it opposes as an absurd insistence on “absolute conformity” to doctrinal truth. It paints the insistence on God’s grace as being expressed in a ridiculous demand for total, unerring perfection in expressing doctrinal propositions.

This characterization makes the alternative tolerance and patience with those who confess Arminianism seem so much more reasonable and proper. In fact, the insistence on grace alone does not mean some rigid, perfect expression of doctrinal points which are used like weapons against those who can’t pronounce them properly. It simply means that any qualification of grace or making God salvation conditional on something other than the righteousness of Christ, when identified, must be rejected as sinful.

By characterizing a concern for the true confession of God’s grace as a kind of quest for “perfect speech” which regards with suspicion any who “don’t get it right”, this argument draws attention away from the salient concern of a biblical confession and makes love for the truth appear as a kind of cruelty toward those who are not as well educated or properly versed in how to express doctrine in the proper way.

The debate is not over “saying it right”. The debate is over the issue of whether it is sinful to believe that salvation depends on man instead of the righteousness and work of Jesus Christ, and whether confessions do make salvation in some way dependent on the creature, when identified, should properly be repented of an forsaken, like every other sin must be acknowledged and forsaken when brought to light.

In other words, it is a moral issue, not an issue of how smart you are, or how well you can pronounce big theological words. If the Bible says that it is pleasing to God and honoring to him to give glory to him and to thankfully acknowledge that salvation comes from him alone, and you say that some of the glory belongs to you by a confession which clearly makes salvation conditional on the inherent goodness or ability of man, is this sinful? If it is, should it not be identified as such and repented of? Should a person who refuses to repent of such a confession be seen as a person who is persisting in unrepentant sin?

The defense of the false gospel avoids framing the discussion on moral terms, because then the implications of defending a confession which is morally compromised would not be flattering to those who defend it they would be seen as defending sin! So the issue is consistently framed by the defenders of the false gospel as an issue of “getting the facts straight”, an issue of being smart, of being “consistent”, of “saying it right”. In other words, the real point of the false confession its sinful claim to human sovereignty and goodness which is repugnant to God” is avoided and the attention is called to the supposedly paranoid concern for “saying it right”. On these terms, a concern for the grace of God alone as the reason for salvation seems like much ado about nothing.

And it is here that the manner the argument above frames the discussion is exposed as very wicked. Because concern to confess God as the only Savior and to renounce all self- righteousness is not much ado about nothing, but is a concern which can only truly exist on account of the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 12:3).

Finally, this argument defends the false gospel by giving more weight to the work of man in securing a true confession than the power of God in giving one. It grants legitimacy to the idea that the Christian life does not depend on truth for its sustenance, but rather involves the discovery of truth based on the sincere desire of those who presumably seek for it, and the willingness of teachers and preachers of the truth to give it to them in small enough doses so they do not choke on it.

This argument therefore involves nothing less than the subjugation of the sanctification of God to human psychology and human effort. In no place does the Bible indicate that people are saved by an Arminian gospel, and sanctified into the confession of a Calvinistic gospel. How dishonoring to God to even imply that the precious promise of salvation, forgiveness and final glory conditioned solely on the righteousness of Christ could ever be called the same message if it became the promise of salvation, forgiveness and eternal glory conditioned on the free will of man! The faith which embraces something conditioned on man is not true faith, but presumption and false confidence. Presumption and false confidence does not lead to truth, but to more refined versions of itself.

There is only one way that a person can change from the conviction that his relationship to God depends on his own work, to the conviction that “Salvation is of the LORD!” (Jonah 2:9). It is the way of the gift of repentance, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not “harsh, intolerant Procrustians” who invented a “believe-it-or-else” gospel. It is God himself. The resentment implicit in this argument for an “either-or” view of truth is really resentment for the God who said:

“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.” (John 3:36).

ARGUMENT #6:

“Look at the hymns of John and Charles Wesley. They are full of grace, clear testimonies to the truth of the gospel. Nevertheless, John Wesley, for example, vigorously opposed the Reformed doctrine of predestination and unconditional election. This inconsistency in John Wesley does not diminish the wonderful legacy he left not only the evangelical, but also the Reformed world. To fail to acknowledge this is to go beyond the clear testimony of Scripture, because the hymns of the Wesleys are, for the most part, soundly biblical and therefore soundly Reformed, even if he may not have seen himself as a “Reformed” person in the classical sense.

“John Wesley may have been an Arminian. Nevertheless, his inconsistency in doctrine is more than offset by wonderful contribution his life, zeal for Christ, and fully biblical and God- honoring heritage has made down the centuries since his death. He is truly a beloved hero of the faith. I am Reformed. I believe the Reformed Faith is the very truth of Scripture. Yet I also believe that people who claim Arminians are not or can not be true Christian believers are clearly exposed by the wonderful example of a man like John Wesley, who loved the Lord Jesus and sought the salvation of the lost, even if he was confused, even sadly confused, about Calvinism.”

ANSWER: This appeal to Wesley as a paragon of Christian virtue is often made by those who want to argue for tolerance of “evangelical Arminianism”. Few would have the audacity to suggest that a man as accomplished and beloved as John Wesley was not a true Christian, and therefore an appeal to his life and testimony is frequently made to silence what is derided as foolish and dangerous: that Arminian doctrine and true Christian faith are hostile to one another.

Further, this argument wields what it considers to be an invincibly powerful weapon: The Wesley hymns. Why, many of these hymns are found in the pages of Reformed hymnals! They eloquently testify to the truth of grace, and the glory of the work of God in securing forgiveness for those who believe:

“Thy mighty name salvation is,
And keeps my happy soul above;
Comfort it brings, and power and peace
And joy in everlasting love:
To me, with thy dear Name are given
Pardon, and holiness, and heaven.”

(From “Thou Hidden Source of Calm Repose” by Charles Wesley)

“No non-Christian could have written words like this”, it is argued. “Therefore if one wants doctrinal proof that these men were true believers in the righteousness of Christ, one need only look at and read the hymns. If he is a true Christian, he will have a difficult time not singing them!”

So, how do we answer? Are there not many more precious Christian people like Wesley who, in the present time, stand as living testimonies against the kind of Calvinistic absolutism which would exclude them from the kingdom of God, and which even looks silly and mean in the light of the great piety and love for the Scriptures to be found among such persons?

We answer with the words of Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word it is because there is no light in them.”

The real issue is not human opinion as to the Christian zeal of John Wesley. The real issue is not whether John Wesley said things or wrote songs which are biblical, for it is fully possible for a person to write and teach and say things which are in agreement with the statements or teaching of Scripture and nevertheless not make a true confession of the grace of God.

The real issue is whether the Word of God gives anyone the right to judge that a person who professes antipathy for the biblical teaching about the grace of God in the gospel is a wonderful, sincere, God-honoring believer and a true Christian.

Indeed, we have no way of knowing whether anyone is of the elect, Wesley included, for we do not know the whole of Wesley’s life on this earth. Undoubtedly, the God who saved the Thief on the cross can save me, and can save Wesley. The issue is, do we, on the ground of the fact that Wesley was a professed believer in the false gospel of Arminianism, have the right to make the judgment that he was a true, biblical Christian, a person with a credible profession of faith in Christ?

And the answer to the real issue is clear: No.

In not one single place does the Bible give us the right to say that a person who takes exception to the clear teaching about God’s electing grace is expressing true faith, or should be regarded as a believer in the face of a continued holding to this exception without repentance.

Indeed, the biblical testimony reveals a concern which runs in the opposite direction to that which judges Wesley’s life to exhibit true Christian faith. This is apparent in at least three ways.

First, according to the Bible, outward appearance, personal reputation, and zeal for God and the Bible are no indication of true faith. These issues are often factors in arguments like the one above, which

supposedly prove that persons who have a good reputation and are zealous for God must be true Christians. At each of these points, however, the Bible forbids us to judge with a positive endorsement.

For example, drawing conclusions based on outward appearance is condemned in 1 Samuel 16:17, John 7:24, and Galatians 2:6. In his sinful idolatry, man typically judges by using himself as the standard. There is a propensity to make decisions based on appearance. God, who knows the hearts of all men, does not judge according to outward appearance, nor does he call us to do so, but rather forbids such judgment.

Personal reputation is also excluded by the Scriptures as a basis for positive endorsement where the truth is concerned. Consider the statement of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 1:8. In this passage, the Apostle states: “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

The Apostle doubtless had a reputation for preaching the truth and for clearly proclaiming the will of God to his hearers. Nevertheless, he forbids the Galatians from drawing any conclusions from his personal reputation which would prevent them from seeing that the only thing that they can trust is the truth itself, and “even if we, or an angel from heaven”, that is, even if one with the reputation of an Apostle, or a messenger from God himself, were to contradict and preach a different gospel, that reputation would mean nothing, and a curse should be on him.

Further, Jesus spoke about reputation and the acclaim of men in Luke 6:26 in a way which should make us repent of seeing personal reputation as some kind of indication of legitimacy: “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.” In view of the foregoing statement, a person can have a universally good reputation and be commended by all, and be a false prophet. This means that personal reputation, the Apostle Paul’s, John Wesley’s or anyone else, is no ground for a positive judgment.

Zeal for God and the Bible is also no indication of genuine faith, or ground for the judgment that a person is a true Christian. In Romans 10:1ff. the Apostle speaks about the Israelites as those who “have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge”. Many among them were avid students of the Bible and were very industrious in seeking converts (John 5:39; Matthew 23:15). This was no proof of genuine faith or understanding of the truth. It still is not. The Apostle Paul is an example of passionate religious zeal, knowledge of the Scriptures, and principled adherence to high moral standards, faultless according to legalistic righteousness. Yet in that condition he had yet to hear the truth of the revelation of God’s righteousness in the gospel, and, as Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of the church, he was un-converted.

Second, the point at which Wesley diverged from the doctrine of Scripture was not minor or incidental, but was The Point at the heart of the biblical message: Whether God’s work of salvation depends wholly on his work of grace by Jesus Christ or whether God’s work of salvation is conditioned upon the will of man the sinner.

Unqualified grace is the only saving grace taught in the Bible. It is grace apart from human works. It is therefore the grace of election, for if the administration of God’s grace is not dependent upon the will of man, then it is dependent upon the will of God, and the expression of God’s will to give his grace to sinful man is called election in the Bible. Consider Romans 11:5, 6:

“Even then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.”

If Wesley did not believe in the “election of grace” than he did not believe in grace as it is biblically defined, and he did not, so far as the Bible is concerned, believe in grace at all, no matter how much he

formally affirmed and used the word, or how many songs he wrote about it. According to numerous written statements of Wesley, he rejected the biblically defined grace of God in favor of a “grace” which was conditioned upon the free will of the sinner, and given to sinners whose foreseen faith made them a candidate for it.

In other words Wesley affirmed “grace” on the condition of meritorious human works, in accordance with the devil’s lie which is the very heart of the Arminian gospel the doctrine of human sovereignty.

Is a biblical understanding of grace essential to true faith in Jesus Christ? Is grace at the heart and core of the biblical gospel? Yes, and yes. Did Wesley have such an understanding? By his own admission, he did not. How important is this? It is a matter of life or death.

In view of the grave nature of Wesley’s exception to the teaching of the biblical gospel, is it wise or proper to give the positive endorsement to his profession by overlooking the fact that he did not believe in biblical grace? It is not. In fact, it is a demonstration of disrespect and even contempt toward God to do so, because to do so implies that God is so impotent in his ability to bring forth a faithful confession from those he chooses to minister in his Name that Wesley persisted for his entire public ministry in opposition to the grace with is at the very heart of the gospel he professed to preach.

Finally, the Bible would prohibit us from giving positive endorsement to the confession of Wesley because the only ground for such judgment found in the Bible is agreement with the truth. 2John 9 states: “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the father and the Son.” Did Wesley abide in the doctrine of Christ? One can answer “yes” to this question only if one does not consider the gospel of God’s grace to be the doctrine of Christ, for Wesley was an avowed Arminian who rejected the biblical grace of God and replaced it with a “grace” that was conditioned on the sinner, a “grace” that is no grace at all, but is reward for human work.

To state, supposedly from the perspective of the truth, that a person’s “inconsistency in doctrine (*read, denial of biblical grace*) is more than offset by the wonderful contribution his life, zeal for Christ, and fully biblical and God honoring heritage he has made” is to reveal a judgment based not on the Bible, but on the very heresy that one supposedly overlooks in endorsing the profession of Wesley as a Christian profession.

Why? Because it shows that one is “weighing” the profession of Wesley on a scale which balances the “good things” he says on the one side and the “bad things” he says on the other side, and one has arbitrarily decided that in the light of the “positive” things Wesley said and did, his denial of biblical grace is not that important. This is the kind of reasoning used by the works- righteousness false gospel in which a person’s degree of righteousness is taken into account where the Lord’s salvation is concerned.

Anyone making such a judgment, in view of the fact that God’s grace is extended because of the blood-shedding of his only Son, should fear of their willingness to make it, and, by God’s mercy, change their mind about their readiness to see the one thing needful (the true grace of God) as incidental to a salvation they may equate with zeal and exemplary piety.

Therefore we conclude that defending the false gospel by appealing to the life and ministry of Wesley is nothing more or less than a confession of the gospel Wesley believed. We soberly warn that those making this defense should be gravely concerned that in their approbation of the “evangelical Arminianism” of Wesley, they invite the judgment of God which is according to truth (Romans 2:2).

Source: <http://www.sgc-gettysburg.org/writings/argumentintr.asp>