

Differences between Semi-Pelagianism and Arminian Beliefs and why both still appeal to natural human ability, apart from grace.

[Semi-Pelagianism]

While not denying the necessity of Grace for salvation, Semi-Pelagianism maintains that the first steps towards the Christian life are ordinarily taken **by the human will** and that Grace supervened only later.

[Arminianism]

In contrast to semi-pelagianism, Arminianism teaches that the **first steps of grace are taken by God**. This teaching derives from the **Remonstrance of 1610**, a codification of the teachings of Jacob Arminius (1559-1609). Here are the **3rd** and **4th** articles of five to show how close it actually sounds to traditional Calvinism, but still left with a small **island of righteousness** for man, as you will see:

III. That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the working of his own free-will, inasmuch as in his state of apostasy and sin he can for himself and by himself think nothing that is good--nothing, that is, truly good, such as saving faith is, above all else. But that it is necessary that by God, in Christ and through his Holy Spirit he be born again and renewed in understanding, affections and will and in all his faculties, that he may be able to understand, think, will, and perform what is truly good, according to the Word of God [John 15:5].

IV. That this grace of God is the beginning, the progress and the end of all good; so that even the regenerate man can neither think, will nor effect any good, nor withstand any temptation to evil, without grace precedent (or prevenient), awakening, following and co-operating. So that all good deeds and all movements towards good that can be conceived in through must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. But with respect to the mode of operation, **grace is not irresistible**; for it is written of **many that they resisted the Holy Spirit** [Acts 7 and elsewhere passim].

Reformed Theology by contrast teaches that the natural men may have common grace, common illuminations, and common affections that are from the Spirit of God. Natural men have sometimes the influences of the Spirit of God in His common operations and gifts, and therefore God's Spirit is said to be striving with them, and they are said to resist the Spirit, (Acts 7:51;) to grieve and vex God's Holy Spirit, (Eph. 4:30; Isaiah 63:10;) While indeed fallen men resist grace every day when the gospel is presented to them, for that is their nature and desire. But it is important to note that God can and does make His grace effectual or irresistible at a time of His sovereign merciful choosing (John 6:37, 39, 44, 63-65; John 3:8; Matt 11:27; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Paul's conversion in Acts 2:39, Acts 9; Rom 8:30 ROM 9:11-24; 1 Cor. 1:9-26; Gal. 1:6-15; 1 Thess. 1:5, 6; 1 Thess. 2:12; 5:24; 2 Thess. 2:14; Eph. 1:18; 4:1-4, 5; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:9; 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3-10). If this kind of effectual grace can be resisted, as Arminians claim, then faith is understood as a natural preparation for saving grace, as the fulfillment of a condition for receiving supernatural grace by the performance of something that is within man's natural capacity/desire to do. Man, in this scheme, cooperates with God's prevenient grace according to his native ability. But the Scripture teaches that salvation is not a faith-contribution or a principle standing ultimately independent of God's action of grace. Rather, it does not owe exclusively to man's natural endowment with a free will and does not arise out of an inherent capacity of the natural man, as Arminians teach. Rather, God acts unilaterally and exclusively, taking the sole initiative in a free act of sovereign grace—grace that is altogether prior to, and productive of, justifying faith.

Hannah More said:

"The sacred writings frequently point out the analogy between natural and spiritual things. The same Spirit, which in the creation of the world moved upon the face of the waters, operates on the human character to produce a new heart and a new life. By this operation the affections and faculties of the man receive a new impulse -- his **dark understanding is illuminated**, his rebellious **will** is subdued, his irregular **desires** are rectified; his **judgment** is informed, his **imagination** is chastised, his **inclinations** are sanctified; his **hopes** and fears are directed to their true and adequate end. Heaven becomes the object of his hopes, and eternal separation from God the object of his fears. **His love of the world is transformed into the love of God.** The lower faculties are pressed into the new service. The senses have a higher direction. The whole internal frame and constitution receive a **nobler bent**; the intents and purposes of the mind, a sublimer aim; his aspirations, a loftier flight; his vacillating desires find a fixed object; his vagrant purposes a settled home; his disappointed heart a certain refuge. That heart, no longer the worshiper of the world, is struggling to become its conqueror. Our blessed Redeemer, in overcoming the world, bequeathed us his command to overcome it also; but as he did not give the command without the example, so he did not give the example without the offer of a power to obey the command."

While it is clear that Arminian Theology and Semi-Pelagianism have a different view of grace; (Arminianism believes God must initiate with grace and Semi-pelagianism believes man must initiate to receive grace), but both systems ultimately share in common a characteristic - **synergism**. The question Arminians still need to answer is why do some people believe the gospel and not others? Is the power/desire to cooperate with God's grace itself a work of the Holy Spirit or of the natural man? How can a natural man produce holy affections without God illuminating the mind and heart? What ultimately makes men to differ? grace or faith?

"Oh!" saith the Arminian, "men may be saved if they will." We reply, "My dear sir, we all believe that; but it is just the "if they will" that is the difficulty. We assert that no man will come to Christ unless he be drawn; nay, we do not assert it, but Christ himself declares it--"Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life;" and as long as that "ye will not come" stands on record in Holy Scripture, we shall not be brought to believe in any doctrine of the freedom of the human will." It is strange how people, when talking about free-will, talk of things which they do not at all understand. "Now," says one, "I believe men can be saved if they will." My dear sir, that is not the question at all. The question is, are men ever found naturally willing to submit to the humbling terms of the gospel of Christ? We declare, upon Scriptural authority, that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, and so inclined to everything that is evil, and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human will ever be constrained towards Christ. You reply, that men sometimes are willing, without the help of the Holy Spirit. I answer--Did you ever meet with any person who was?... "

- C.H. Spurgeon ([Human Inability](#))

I question whether we have preached the whole counsel of God, unless predestination with all its solemnity and sureness be continually declared.

- C.H. Spurgeon (Sermons, Vol. 6, p. 26)

Arminianism is a movement traced to the work of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). "A convinced Calvinist who was educated at the University of Leyden and at Geneva, he eventually departed from the teachings of John Calvin on several points of doctrine. Although the movement associated with Arminius came to

be synonymous with anti-Calvinism, it was a reaction against an orthodox expression of Calvinism that was placing particular emphasis on predestination and a cluster of doctrines associated with it.... "A major reason for the Calvinists' opposition to Arminius's position was their desire to uphold...the sovereignty of God, **whereby all credit for human salvation rests with God**. This view is also called monergism, which indicates that God is the sole party operative to effect human salvation. Arminius's view may be described as synergism, which indicates that God's grace initiates the act of salvation but, to become effective, grace operates with the human act of response to grace. For Arminius this meant that "the grace sufficient for salvation is conferred on the Elect, and on the non-Elect; that if they will, they may believe or not believe, may be saved or not saved...." (Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America)

"Free will carried many a soul to hell, but never a soul to heaven"
- A man is not saved against his will, but he is made willing by the operation of the Holy Ghost. A mighty grace which he does not wish to resist enters into the man, disarms him, makes a new creature of him, and he is saved. (Sermons, Vol. 10, p.309)

- C.H. Spurgeon

Arminianism & Semi-Pelagianism: While distinct, what these two views hold in common is that they both are **synergistic** soteriological constructs. These heterodox belief systems about grace are plaguing the church of the 21st century. In all synergistic theology, sola fide cooperates with God's grace as the human fulfillment of a condition for the actualization of a saving possibility (a mere possibility) that God universally offers. Such a faith-contribution is itself a principle standing ultimately independent of God's action of grace; it owes exclusively to man's natural endowment with a free will and thus arises out of an inherent capacity of the natural man. Because election is God's response to foreseen faith (a non sequitur), faith becomes to some extent the cause or sine qua non of salvation, and we again have justification because of—conditioned on—faith, with Grace merely perfecting Nature. Arminianism thus reintroduced the dialectics of Nature and Grace by setting faith over against grace as an independent, autonomous, (ultimate, not penultimate) principle.

Source: http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/Arm_Semi_Differences.html