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Calvinism vs arminianism chart

The following material from Romans: An Interpretive Outline (pp.144-147). by David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, contrasts the Five Points of Arminianism with the Five Points of Calvinism in the clearest and most concise form that we have seen anywhere. It is also found in their smaller book, The Five Points of Calvinism (pp.



16-19). Both books are published by The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia.(1963). Messrs. Steele and Thomas have served for several years as co-pastors of a Southern Baptist church, in Little Rock, Arkansas. Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation. Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not — indeed he cannot — choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ — it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature.



Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation— it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God. Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness.

Arminianism	Calvinism
1. Sinner, can do good & respond to God	• Man unable of self to respond to God
2. God elects on basis of foreseen faith	• God elects according to His good pleasure
3. Christ died for all	• Christ died for Elect
4. Man can resist God	• Irresistible election
5. Believer may lose salvation	• Elect can never lose salvation

God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation. Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not — indeed he cannot — choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ — it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation— it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God. Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it. Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, therefore guaranteeing their salvation. The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man. In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The eternal call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion.

	Arminianism	Calvinism
Doctrine	As a result of the Fall, man has inherited a corrupted nature. Preventive grace has removed the guilt and condemnation of Adam's sin.	As a result of the Fall, man is totally depraved and dead in sin; he is unable to save himself. Because he is dead in sin, God must initiate salvation.
Imputation of sin	God did not impute to the entire human race through Adam's sin, but all people inherit a corrupt nature as a result of Adam's sin.	Through Adam's transgression, sin was imputed—passed to the entire race—so that all people are born in sin.
Election	God elected those whom He knew would believe of their own free will. Election is conditional, based on man's response to faith.	God unconditionally, from eternity past, elected some to be saved. Election is not based on man's future response.
	Christ died for the entire human race.	Christ died only for the elect.

By mean, of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation by man's will, nor is He dependent upon man's cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God', grace.

Calvinism vs Arminianism (5 Points)		
	Calvinism	Arminianism
Lossness of man	Total Inability (or depravity)	Free will or human ability
Election	Unconditional	Conditional
Atonement	Limited	General
Grace	Irresistible	Resistible
Falling	Perseverance of Saints	Falling from Grace possible

therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended. Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc. All Arminian, have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ — that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost. All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end. Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God (who takes the initiative) and man (who must respond)—man's response being the determining factor. God has provided salvation for everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who, of their own free will, "choose" to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the crucial point, man's will plays a decisive role; thus man, not God, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation. Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the Triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation. It is a debate that goes back nearly 500 years and continues today. Does the Bible teach Calvinism or Arminianism; synergism or monergism, the free will of man or the sovereign decree of God?

At the heart of the debate is one central question: what is the ultimate determining factor in salvation; God's sovereign will or man's free will? In this article we will briefly compare the two theologies, consider their biblical arguments, and see which of the two is faithful to the text of Scripture. We'll begin with definitions, and then work our way through the classic 5 disputed points. History of Calvinism Calvinism was named after the French/Swiss reformer John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin was massively influential and his reformed teachings spread quickly around Europe. His writings (Bible commentaries and The Institutes of the Christian Religion) are still widely influential in the Christian church, especially among Reformed churches. Much of what we call Calvinism was defined after Calvin's death. Controversy over Calvin's theology (and that of his followers) emerged because Jacob Arminius and his followers rejected Calvin's teachings. It was at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), in response to specific Arminian disagreements, that the five points of Calvinism were defined and articulated. Today, many modern pastors and theologians around the world espouse and vigorously defend Calvinism (though not everyone is comfortable with the term Calvinism, some prefer Reformed Theology, or simply, The Doctrines of Grace). Prominent recent pastors/teachers/theologians include Abraham Kuyper, R.C. Sproul, John MacArthur, John Piper, Philip Hughes, Kevin DeYoung, Michael Horton and Albert Mohler. History of Arminianism Arminianism is named after the aforementioned Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). Arminius was a student of Theodore Beza (Calvin's immediate successor) and became a pastor and then a professor of theology. Arminius began as a Calvinist, and gradually came to reject certain tenets of Calvin's teachings. As a result, controversy spread around Europe. In 1610, followers of Arminius penned a document called The Remonstrance, which became the formal and clearest protest against Calvinism. This led directly to the Synod of Dort, during which the doctrines of Calvinism were articulated. The five points of Calvinism were a direct response to the five objections of the Remonstrants. Today, there are many who consider themselves Arminians or who otherwise reject Calvinism. Prominent recent pastors/teachers/theologians include C.S. Lewis, Clark Pinnock, Billy Graham, Norman Geisler, and Roger Olson. There are 5 major points of disagreement between Calvinists and Arminians. They are 1) the extent of man's depravity, 2) whether election is conditional, 3) the extent of Christ's atonement, 4) the nature of God's grace and 5) whether Christians will/must persevere in the faith. We will briefly survey these five points of disagreement and consider what the Scriptures teach about these. Man's Depravity Calvinism Many Calvinists refer to man's depravity as Total Depravity or Total Inability. Calvinists believe that the depravity of man, as a result of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, renders man totally unable to come to God. Sinful man is dead in sin, slaves of sin, in persistent rebellion against God and enemies of God. Left to themselves, people are unable to move towards God. This does not mean that unregenerate people cannot do good acts, or that all people act as badly as they could act. It simply means they are unwilling and unable to return to God, and nothing they can do can merit God's favor. Arminianism Arminians would agree to an extent with this view. In the Remonstrance (article 3) they argued for what they called Natural Inability which is similar to the Calvinistic doctrine. But in article 4, they proposed the remedy for this inability was "preventive grace". This is a preparing grace from God and is dispensed to all mankind, overcoming man's natural inability. So man is naturally unable to come to God, but because of God's preventive grace all people can now freely choose God. Scriptural Evaluation The Scriptures overwhelmingly affirm that, outside of Christ, man is totally depraved, dead in his sin, slaves to sin, and unable to save himself. Romans 1-3 and Ephesians 2 (et al) make the case emphatically and without qualification. Further, there is no convincing biblical support that God has granted all mankind a preparing grace to overcome this inability. Election Calvinism Calvinists believe that, because man is unable to initiate a saving response to God, man is only saved because election. That is, God elects people on the basis of His sovereign will for reasons in Himself, with no contributing condition from man himself. It is an unconditional act of grace. God sovereignly chose, before the foundation of the world, those who would be saved by His grace, and brought to repentance and faith in Christ. Arminianism Arminians believe that God's election is conditioned upon God's foreknowledge. That is, God elected those whom He knew beforehand would believe in Him. Election is based, not on the sovereign will of God, but ultimately upon man's response to God. Scriptural Evaluation John 3, Ephesians 1, and Romans 9, teach clearly that God's election is not conditional, nor based on any response to God from man. Romans 9:16, for example, says So then (God's purpose of election) depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. Further, the Arminian understanding of foreknowledge is problematic. God's foreknowing people is not merely passive knowledge about the decisions people would make in the future. It is an action God takes beforehand. This is clear, especially from Romans 8:29. God foreknew all who would ultimately be glorified. Since God knows all things about all people of all time, this must mean more than merely knowing things beforehand. This is an active foreknowing, that determines a certain outcome; namely salvation. Christ's Atonement Calvinism Calvinists argue that Jesus' death on the cross effectively atoned (or propitiated) for the sin of all those who would trust in Christ. That is, that Christ's atonement was fully effective for all who believe. Most Calvinists argue that the atonement is sufficient for all, though effective for only the elect (i.e., effective for all who have faith in Christ). Arminianism Arminians argue that Jesus' death on the cross potentially atoned for the sin of all mankind but is only applied to an individual by faith. Thus, those who perish in unbelief will be punished for their own sin, even though Christ paid for their sin.

In the case of those who perish, the atonement was ineffective. Scriptural Evaluation Jesus taught that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for His sheep. There are many passages which speak of God's love for the world, and in 1 John 2:2, it says that Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But Calvinists argue convincingly that these passages do not suggest that Christ's atonement is for all persons without exception, but for all people without distinction. That is, that Christ died for the sins of people from all nations and people groups, and not only for the Jews. Yet, His atonement is effectual in the sense that it actually covers the sins of all the elect. Most Calvinists teach that the gospel offer is genuinely to all, even though the atonement is particularly for the elect. Grace Calvinism Calvinists hold that God's saving grace overcomes, in His elect, the resistance inherent in all of fallen mankind. They do not mean that God drags people, kicking and screaming, to Himself against their will. They mean that God intervenes in a person's life in such a way as to overcome all natural resistance to God, so that they come willingly by faith to Him. Arminianism Arminians reject this and insist that God's grace can be resisted. They object that the Calvinist view reduces mankind to robots with no genuine will (i.e., they argue for Free Will). Scriptural Evaluation The Apostle Paul wrote that no one seeks after God (Romans 3:11). And Jesus taught that none can come to faith in Christ unless God draws him (John 6:44). Further, Jesus said that everyone the Father gives Him will come to Him. All of these passages and many more suggest that God's grace is, indeed, irresistible (in the sense explained above). Perseverance Calvinism Calvinists believe that all true Christians will persevere in their faith to the end. They will never stop believing. Calvinists affirm that God is the ultimate cause for this perseverance, and that he uses many means (support from the body of Christ, the Word of God preached and affirmed and believed, warning passages in the Bible to not fall away, etc.) to keep a Christian persevering in their faith until the end. Arminianism Arminians believe that a genuine Christian may fall away from God's grace and, consequently, finally perish. John Wesley said it like this: [a Christian may] "make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, that he may fall, not only foully, but finally, so as to perish forever." Scriptural Evaluation Hebrews 3:14 says, For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. This clearly means that if we do not hold our original confidence firm to the end, then we have not come to share in Christ now. One who has genuinely shared in Christ will hold firm. Additionally, Romans 8:29-30 has been called the "unbreakable chain of salvation" and indeed it seems to be an unbreakable chain. The doctrine of perseverance is clearly affirmed by Scripture (these passages, and many more). Bottom Line There are many forceful and compelling philosophical arguments against Calvinism. However, the witness of Scripture is just as forceful and compelling in favor of Calvinism. Specifically, the Scriptures are forceful and compelling in their case for a God who is sovereign over all things, including salvation. That God elects for reasons in Himself, and shows mercy on whom He will show mercy. That doctrine does not render man's will invalid. It simply affirms God's will as ultimate and decisive in Salvation. And, at the end of the day, Christians should rejoice that this is so. Left to ourselves - left to our "free will" none of us would chose Christ, or see Him and His gospel as compelling. Aptly are these doctrines named; they are the doctrines of grace.