

Reformed Doctrine of Predestination - Lesson #9, Outline of Systems

There are really only three systems which claim to set forth a way of salvation through Christ. They are:

I. Universalism - holds that Christ died for all men and that eventually all shall be saved, either in this life or through a future probation. This view perhaps makes the strongest appeal to our feelings, but is un-Scriptural, and has never been held by an organized Christian church.

II. Arminianism - holds that Christ died equally and indiscriminately for every individual of mankind, for those who perish no less than for those who are saved: that election is not an eternal and unconditional act of God; that saving grace is offered to every man, which grace he may receive or reject just as he pleases; that man may successfully resist the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit if he chooses to do so; that saving grace is not necessarily permanent, but that those who are loved of God, ransomed by Christ, and born again of the Holy Spirit, may (let God wish and strive ever so much to the contrary) throw away all and perish eternally.

[Arminianism's] leading idea is that divine grace and human will jointly accomplish the work of conversion and sanctification, and that man has the sovereign right of accepting or rejecting. It affirms that man is weak as a result of the fall, but denies that all ability has been lost. Man therefore merely needs divine grace to assist his personal efforts. Or, to put it another way, he is sick, but not dead; he indeed cannot help himself, but he can engage the help of a physician, and can either accept or reject the help when it is offered. He thus has power to co-operate with the grace of God in the matter of salvation. This view exalts man's freedom at the expense of God's sovereignty. It has some apparent, but no real, Scripture authority, and is plainly contradicted by other parts of Scripture.

A. History of Arminianism

- Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) - Dutch pastor and theologian, rejected Beza's theology that it is God who unconditionally elects some for salvation.
- Arminius original followers known as "Remonstrants"; Remonstrants authored "Five articles of Remonstrance"
- Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) - International Synod held by Dutch Calvinists to settle divisive controversy initiated by Remonstrants, Synod concluded with rejection of Arminian views and condemned Arminius and followers as heretics.
- Canons of Dordt - formally titled, "The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands"; Canons of Dordt are published published judicial decision and condemnation of Arminius and followers as heretics
- Canons of Dordt - not intended to be a comprehensive explanation of Reformed doctrine, but only an exposition on the five points of doctrine in dispute.

B. Pelagianism

- existed nearly twelve hundred years before Arminius was born.
- Named after British monk Pelagius (354-420)
- Taught the human will was sufficient to live a sinless life
- Human beings can earn salvation by their own efforts
- Pelagianism denied human depravity, and the necessity of efficacious grace, and exalted the human will above the divine.

1. Semipelagianism

- More closely akin to modern Arminianism

- Teaches that growing in faith is the work of God, while the beginning of faith is an act of man's free will

Pelagianism says man has the capacity to seek God in and of himself apart from any movement of God or the Holy Spirit, and therefore that salvation is affected by man's efforts. Semipelagianism says man and God cooperate to a certain degree in the salvation effort: man can (unaided by grace) make the first move toward God, and God will then complete the work of salvation.

"Its doctrines pleased the natural palate of man, hating, as all men do hate, the doctrine of universal depravity. To say that man could grow holy and spotless, that he could secure God's grace, and attain to salvation by an act of his own free will, was teaching that attracted, as it still does attract, thousands."

- Ben A. Warburton, "Calvinism"

III. Calvinism

Calvinism holds that as a result of the fall into sin all men in themselves are guilty, corrupted, hopelessly lost; that from this fallen mass God sovereignly elects some to salvation through Christ, while passing by others; that Christ is sent to redeem His people by a purely substitutionary atonement; that the Holy Spirit efficaciously applies this redemption to the elect; and that all of the elect are infallibly brought to salvation. This view alone is consistent with Scripture and with what we see in the world about us.

IV. Arminianism vs Calvinism

The chief fault of Arminianism is its insufficient recognition of the part that God takes in redemption. It loves to admire the dignity and strength of man; Calvinism loses itself in adoration of the grace and omnipotence of God. Calvinism casts man first into to supernatural strength. The one flatters natural pride; the other is a gospel for penitent sinners. As that which exalts man in his own sight and tickles his fancies is more welcome to the natural heart than that which abases him, Arminianism is likely to prove itself more popular. Yet Calvinism is nearer to the facts, however harsh and forbidding those facts may seem.

"It is not always the most agreeable medicine which is the most healing. The experience of the apostle John is one of frequent occurrence, that the little book which is sweet as honey in the mouth is bitter in the belly. Christ crucified was a stumbling-block to one class of people and foolishness to another, and yet He was, and is, the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation to all who believe."

- Nathaniel S. McFetridge, "Calvinism in History"

A. Against Arminianism's appeal

We are not at liberty to develop a system of our own liking.

"The question which of these systems is true is not to be decided by ascertaining which is the more agreeable to our feelings or the more plausible to our understanding, but which is consistent with the doctrines of the Bible and the facts of experience...It is the duty of every theologian to subordinate his theories to the Bible, and teach not what seems to him to be true or reasonable, but simply what the Bible teaches...There would be no end of controversy, and no security for any truth whatever, if the strong personal convictions of individual minds be allowed to determine what is, or what is not true, what the Bible may, and what it may not be allowed to teach." - Dr. Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology