

**THE FIVE POINTS**

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## **The Five Points**

“To say, ‘This man is an Arminian,’ has the same effect on many hearers, as to say, ‘he is a mad dog.’ It puts them into a fright at once: They run away from him with all speed and diligence; and will hardly stop, unless it be to throw a stone at the dreadful and mischievous animal.”<sup>i</sup> This is how John Wesley described what he thought most people think about Arminians. Interestingly, W.J. Seaton, a reformed minister, described in a similar way what he thinks most people think about Calvinists. “There is scarcely another word that arouses such suspicion, mistrust, and even animosity among professing Christians as the word Calvinism.”<sup>ii</sup>

Within Protestant Christianity, there are two great creeds that dominate. These are Arminism and Calvinism.<sup>iii</sup> Since the death of James Arminius in 1609, no issues in Protestantism have been as bitterly debated as those regarding Calvinism verses Arminianism. Prior to the Synod of Dordt (1618-19), this conflict even brought the Netherlands to the brink of civil war. Being such a controversial topic, it is obviously one of great importance. Any Christian, whether they be an Arminian, a Calvinist, or an independent, should study the works of these great theologians and their pupils in order to better understand the arguments of those involved in this conflict. Before taking a detailed look at the theology, though, we should look at the men who gave their names to the theology and why they taught the things that they taught.

John Calvin was born at Noyon, France, in 1509, and he was one of the original founders of the Protestant Reformation. He was initially a Roman Catholic, and he hoped to help reform the church from within. After he helped a close friend compose an address that incorporated ideas of Lutheranism, he was forced to flee from France, and he spent the rest of his life in exile. In 1536, he stopped in Geneva and was coerced into helping with the Protestant movement there.

Under Calvin's influence, Geneva was transformed from a city with a bad reputation to one with a strict moral code, and it became the "Rome" of Protestantism. Calvin died in 1564, but he left behind him one of the greatest and most influencing Christian theologies ever written.<sup>iv</sup>

James Arminius was born as James Harmens of Oudewater, Holland, in 1560. He was trained at the University of Geneva, and he studied under Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at the university. In 1589, a well-educated layman named Koornheert opposed the theological position of Beza. It was such a serious threat that Arminius was commissioned to study and refute the teachings of Koornheert. After deeply immersing himself in the writings of St. Paul that Calvinism derives from, he was convinced that the theological positions of Calvinism were in error. He then began to teach things that conflicted with Calvinism, and in open debate, no one could prove him wrong. His adversaries then began spreading rumors that he was a heretic. He sought to have a council arranged where the issues could be discussed, but he was denied his request, and such a council was not arranged until after his death. He died in 1609, and his followers carried on the tradition that he had established.<sup>v</sup>

After Arminius's death, his followers formulated his teachings into five specific areas that conflicted with Calvinism. These were free will, conditional election, general atonement, resistible grace, and falling from grace.<sup>vi</sup> Most Calvinistic teaching came from the idea that predestination was absolute, and the Arminian response was that predestination was conditional.<sup>vii</sup> These five points of Arminianism were presented to the State, and the Synod of Dordt was called in 1618 to examine the teachings of Arminius in the light of the Scriptures. The Synod of Dordt ruled against the Arminians, and it formulated the five points of Calvinism, set directly against the five points of Arminianism. These points were total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.<sup>viii</sup>

The theologians of Calvinism and Arminianism claim that all of their points follow a logical progression from the first point. If humans have free will, then their election must be conditional. If election is conditional, then the atonement must have been universal and grace must be resistible. If grace is resistible, then it must be possible to fall from it. Likewise, if we are depraved beyond the ability of free will, then election must be unconditional. If election is unconditional, then there must be a limited number of people that were atoned for and grace must be irresistible. If grace is irresistible, then the saints must persevere.

The five points of Calvinism and Arminianism are at the heart of the conflict between Calvinists and Arminians. If “John Calvin was a pious, learned, sensible man; and so was James Harmens,”<sup>six</sup> as Wesley said, then there must be both logical and scriptural support behind both of these great theologies. In order to gain a better understanding of Calvinism and Arminianism, I want to take a look at the five points of Calvinism, and their Arminian equivalents, as presented by Calvin, Arminius, and their disciples and then show the scriptures and reasoning that these points derive from.

The first point of Calvinism is total depravity. Total depravity is a state of corruption that infects every part of man’s nature and makes natural man unable to know or obey God.<sup>x</sup> It is synonymous with original sin and carnal nature. Mankind became totally depraved as a result of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. When Adam broke God’s commandment and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he and his descendents became depraved. In Romans 5, Paul speaks about how Adam’s sin brought condemnation for all men. “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (v. 12).” “The many died by the trespass of the one man (v. 15).” “The judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation (v. 16).” “By the trespass of the one man, death

reigned through that one man (v. 17).” “The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men (v. 18).” “Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners (v. 19).”

Scripture describes very vividly the nature of human depravity. In sin, we are dead. “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins (Eph. 2:1).” Without the Spirit, we are untractable. “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolish to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).” On our own, we are helpless against sin. “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate to do (Rom. 7:15).” When we follow the ways of sin, we are God’s enemies. “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (Jam. 4:4).” The ultimate result of sin is death. “Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (Jam. 1:15).”

Calvinism teaches that because of mankind’s depravity, we are unable to have anything to do with our salvation. If we are totally depraved, as scripture teaches, then we are so far gone from righteousness that there is nothing that we can do that will lead to or aid in our salvation. Everything, therefore, must be done by God. It is by His calling that we come to know Him, not by anything that we do. Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah when he says, “I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me (Rom. 10:20).” In our depravity, we did not seek God, and yet He still called us; He still revealed Himself to us.

The Canons of Dordt describe total depravity in this way:

#### Article 1

Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright; all his affections pure; and the whole man was holy; but revolting

from God by the instigation of the Devil, and abusing the freedom of his own will, he forfeited these excellent gifts; and on the contrary entailed himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity and perverseness of judgement, became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections.

#### Article 2

Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation, as the Peligans of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature.

#### Article 3

Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to turn to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation.<sup>xi</sup>

The Calvinistic doctrine from the Council of Dordt given here was written in response to the Arminian doctrine of free will. To say that total depravity is the opposite of free will is erroneous, however. “No man that ever lived, not John Calvin himself, ever asserted . . . original sin . . . in more strong, more clear and express terms, than Arminius has done.”<sup>xii</sup> Arminius himself asserted that without divine grace, in our state of total depravity, we are without free will. “In this state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace.”<sup>xiii</sup> The fifth Article of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene states the Nazarenes’ belief in depravity.

We believe that original sin, or depravity, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which everyone is far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first

parents at the time of their creation, is averse to God, is without spiritual life, and inclined to evil, and that continually.<sup>xiv</sup>

The Canons of Dordt insist that Arminians are opposed to total depravity. Rejection 4 to the “Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine” says, “The Synod rejects the errors of those who teach . . . that the unregenerate man is not really or utterly dead in sin, nor destitute of all powers unto spiritual good.”<sup>xv</sup> The words of Wesley, Arminius, and the Nazarenes given above show that this is not the case, however. A belief in free will is not a rejection of total depravity, or else Arminius would not have supported total depravity. The belief of free will taught by Arminians is merely that God, by His own sovereign will, choose to give humankind free will, even in its state of depravity.

The Arminian view of what free will is and how it can coexist with total depravity is described best in the Nazarene Articles of Faith.

We believe that the human race’s creation in Godlikeness included ability to choose between right and wrong, and that thus human beings were made morally responsible; that through the fall of Adam they became depraved so that they cannot now turn and prepare themselves by their own natural strength and works to faith and calling upon God. But we also believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is freely bestowed upon all people, enabling all who will to turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable In His sight.<sup>xvi</sup>

Basically, the Arminian believes that we are all totally depraved, and so much so that on our own we have no free will; but because of God’s prevenient grace, we are all given the opportunity to choose to follow Him. Prevenient grace “simply means that God is lovingly and graciously present and active in every human life . . . Prevenient grace is God never giving up on anyone.”<sup>xvii</sup> Because God is active in every human life, and He is constantly wooing us from sin back to Himself, we are given the freedom to choose to follow Him. C.S. Lewis said that

freedom is “the gift whereby ye most resemble your Maker and are yourselves parts of eternal reality.”<sup>xviii</sup> God, as the Creator, has complete freedom, and we, as beings made in His image, have that same freedom. Michael Lodahl writes that, “God is willing to take the risks inherent in bestowing freedom upon us, because our moral agency, necessary to authentic relationships, is of sufficiently great value to Him.”<sup>xix</sup> If He is truly to have beings made in His image, then we must have the ability to choose freely. This ability to choose freely cannot be a result of God forcing our will to match His will, either, for “what sort of freedom would it be whose options were so severely limited?”<sup>xx</sup> Thus His will that humankind be in His image is only possible by Him allowing humankind to have freedom.

Like total depravity, free will is also taught in scripture. Prior to Abel’s murder, God said to Cain, “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it (Gen. 4:7).” This implies that Cain had a choice to continue in sin or do what was right. Abraham was given the choice to either follow God’s commandment and sacrifice his son, or to withhold his son and lose God’s favor (Gen. 22). Joshua said to the Israelites, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . (Josh. 24:15).” The Prophets are full of scriptures that condemn Israel and Judah for choosing to abandon the ways of God, implying that they were free to choose between following Him or rejecting Him. Blessings are promised if they follow, and curses if they don’t. Jesus’ parable of the wedding banquet tells of guests who rejected the invitations and others who accepted them (Matt. 22:1-14). The Old and New Testaments are both filled with examples of people who were given choices and held responsible for the results of their choices. No where does it imply that these people had no choice but to choose as they did.



The early church fathers also confirmed free will. St. Augustine, even though he believed in predestination, acknowledged the fact that man's will can act in contrary to God's will. "But it does not follow that, though there is for God a certain order of all causes, there must therefore be nothing depending on the free exercise of our own wills."<sup>xxi</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas also taught free will. "For some things are so produced by God that, being intelligent, they bear a resemblance to Him and reflect His image. Hence, not only are they directed, but they direct themselves to their appointed end by their own actions."<sup>xxii</sup>

The second point of Calvinism is unconditional election or predestination. In this doctrine, we are given the idea that God chose all those who would be saved before the foundations of the earth were laid. He did not do this because of anything that those individuals had done, but simply because it was His will to save those individuals and not others. His election of those individuals was not because of any action that He foresaw; rather, those individuals had actions because of their election. A person accepts Christ because that person was elected to do so; that person is not elected because he or she accepted Christ.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The doctrine of unconditional election has many scriptures that support it. "For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28)." This verse implies that those who love God do so because they were called to do so. Romans 9:14-23 gives us the idea that by His sovereign will, God has chosen whom to be merciful and compassionate to. Not only this, but it also gives us the possibility that He has created some people specifically for damnation. Acts 13:48 says, "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." In this verse, it specifically says that those who were chosen were the ones who accepted, not the other way around. To the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote,

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will (Eph. 1:4-5).” Again, we are presented with the idea that purely by God’s own sovereign choice is anyone chosen for salvation.

The Calvinist says that unconditional election follows a logical progression from total depravity. “If man is . . . dead . . . then the remedy . . . must lie without man himself . . . If man is unable to save himself on account of the Fall in Adam being a total fall, and if God alone can save, and if all are not saved, then the conclusion must be that God has not chosen to save all.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

The Canons of Dordt that promote unconditional election are these:

#### Article 7

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world, He hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation . . .

#### Article 9

The election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc . . .

#### Article 10

The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election . . .

#### Article 11

And as God Himself is most wise, unchangeable, omniscient and omnipotent, so the election made by Him can neither be interrupted nor changed, recalled or annulled, neither can the elect be cast away, nor their number diminished.<sup>xxv</sup>

The Arminian opposite of unconditional election is conditional election. This doctrine says that there are certain conditions, dependant upon ourselves, that we must meet in order to be elected. Arminians believe that God's election and predestination are based out of foreknowledge. Since God is omniscient, He knows what choices we will make. God's call goes out to all people, but only the elect respond to it. These people are considered elect because they have sought Christ's forgiveness of their sins. Since election is conditional, if those who have accepted Christ continue in their sinful lifestyle without seeking sanctification, or if they return to a sinful lifestyle, then they do not keep their election.

The Calvinistic idea that total depravity necessarily leads to unconditional election is erroneous, since Arminians believe in total depravity but not in unconditional election. The Arminian agrees that God has to be the one that brings about a person's salvation, but just because not everyone has been saved does not mean that God's call does not go out to everyone. The idea of why God would allow free will has already been discussed. This idea is continued here. Mankind is totally depraved, and God has given prevenient grace to everyone that they might come to salvation. So that we might be in His image, He has left us with free will that we may choose to answer or reject His call. Our choice is what the condition of our election is based upon. This is how total depravity and conditional election can coexist.

Scripture teaches very clearly that salvation comes about after humankind has made a response to God's call. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life . . . Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed

in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:16, 18).” This passage teaches us that belief is required on an individual's part if salvation is to come about. Abraham's justification, according to Paul, came about because of his faith (Rom. 4). Peter speaks of what the pagans choose to do, not what they're predestined to do (1 Pet. 4:3). He also says, “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall (2 Pet. 1:10).” The election that Peter is talking about here is very obviously, by his wording, an election that the individual can either facilitate or frustrate.

The third point of Calvinism is limited atonement. Following the progression of Calvinism, if God's election is unconditional, then those who are elected must be saved. If this is the case, then there is a set number of people who receive atonement for their sins by Christ's death. Thus, limited atonement is the idea that the atonement was limited to a certain number and to certain individuals. Calvinists claim that this point not only brings us to the central point of Calvinism, but to the central point of the Gospel. The very purpose of Christ's death on the cross was to bring about the atonement, so when we determine whom the atonement was for, we can determine who Christ died for and whom the Gospel message is for.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Limited atonement is harder to prove directly from scripture. It is more of the logical conclusion of unconditional election than it is a direct truth of God. There are three different possibilities of people for whom the atonement was for: it was for all men, it was for no one in particular, or it was for a specific number. If it was for all men, then all men will be saved. Because of all the scripture speaking of God's wrath and the consequences of falling away, this does not seem like the case. If atonement was for no one in particular, but open to all men, then God is a failure, because not all men are saved. If only certain people were atoned for, then the

atonement was a great success, because these people are the elect. Because God is sovereign and cannot fail, following this logic, the third option seems the most plausible.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Since the atonement is the covering over of our sins by the blood of Christ, this seems like an appropriate place to talk about the Calvinistic doctrine of imputed righteousness, which contrasts with the Arminian doctrine of imparted righteousness. Imputed righteousness means that we are declared righteous, even though we are not. This is possible only through the blood of Christ. By his blood, our sins are covered over, and they are not seen or held against us by God.

The Canons of Dordt say this about limited atonement:

#### Article 8

For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect . . . He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father . . .<sup>xxviii</sup>

The Arminian view of atonement is that of general atonement. The Arminians believe that Christ's death was for everybody, and anyone who chooses to follow Him can receive the atonement. This view seems to be well supported by scripture. "For God so loved the *world* . . . that *whoever* believes in him . . . (John 3:16)." "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to *all* who believe. There is no difference, for *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:22-24)." "For God has bound *all men* over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on *them all* (Rom. 11:32)." "Your Father in heaven is not willing that *any* of these little ones should be lost (Matt. 18:14)." No where in any of these passages does it imply that

atonement is only for a selected few. On the contrary, they encourage the preaching of the Gospel to all people so that everyone may be saved.

The Arminian view of righteousness is that of imparted righteousness. In this view, God imparts His nature in us, and we become righteous. Like general atonement, this also has a strong scriptural basis. “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Rom. 6:4).” This passage says “that we may live a new life”, not just the old one covered up by Christ’s blood. Throughout Romans 6, 7, and 8, Paul makes it very clear that in Christ, we die to sin and become alive to righteousness, not that our sins are hidden. The idea that Christ’s blood only gives us imputed righteousness, not imparted righteousness, seems to limit God’s sovereignty, an accusation that is normally made of Arminianism. For if God is sovereign, does it not follow that He can eradicate depravity within the human soul if He so chooses?

The fourth point of Calvinism is irresistible grace. This doctrine teaches that God’s calling is irresistible; once He has called an individual to His flock, that individual is helpless against His calling. Calvinists teach that there are two callings, an outward one and an inward one. The outward calling is the preaching of the Word done by humans, and this is resistible. The inward calling, however, is the wooing of the Holy Spirit to the human soul. The human will is powerless but to accept God’s inward calling once it has been given. This point is, once again, the logical follow-up of the previous points. If God elects certain individuals to righteousness, then those individuals are helpless against His will.

Like most everything else discussed here, there is scriptural support of irresistible grace. “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away

(John 6:37)." "Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me (John 6:45)." There are multiple scriptures that refer to the calling (John 6:44, Rom. 8:14, Gal. 1:15, 1 Pet. 2:9, 1 Pet. 5:10), but not all of these specify it as being irresistible. All of the disciples that Jesus called left whatever they were doing at the time and followed Him without question. Perhaps the most convincing example of irresistible grace is the calling of Paul. Prior to his calling, he passionately hated Christians, and he zealously persecuted them. After his calling, however, he became the greatest Christian theologian to ever live.

Here is the article from the Canons of Dordt that irresistible grace derives from:

#### Article 8

As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what will be acceptable to Him; namely, that all who are called, should comply with the invitation. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him.

Arminians believe that God's grace can, in fact, be resisted. This follows their belief that He allows us free will and that His greater will is served by allowing us free will, despite the fact that our free will results in us acting against His will. God, out of His love for us, gently calls and woos our souls to Him. It is similar to the "gentle whisper" of God that called Elijah to Him, even in the midst of Elijah's depression (1 Kings 19:11-13). God did not force Elijah to Him with the powerful wind, earthquake, or fire. He wooed him to Him by His gentle love. By loving us and allowing us free will, God makes it possible for us to love Him in return. How could we truly love Him, as we are commanded, if our love is forced and not of our own free will?

When we look at the story of Cain and Abel, we see an example of God's calling being resisted. When Cain's sacrifice is rejected, God asks Him, "Why are you angry? Why is your

face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it (Gen. 4:6-7).” God does not force His will upon Cain and force Him to not be angry or not murder Abel, He calls Cain gently and seeks to reason logically with Cain, despite the fact that Cain was a depraved individual and God had no obligation to him. Lodahl describes this situation in this way:

God, the Bestower and Encourager of freedom, will not overrule Cain’s murderous intentions. God simply speaks to Cain, attempting to lure him to exercise his freedom in a different, less destructive fashion. God is with Cain, whispering to him, questioning him, attempting to draw him away from hatred and murder. But God will not coerce Cain—and therefore allows human bloodshed to break loose.<sup>xxix</sup>

In the story of the rich young man (Matt. 19:16-30), we have another example of God’s call being resisted. The man asked Jesus what he needed to do to get eternal life. After some dialogue between the two, Jesus said, “Come, follow me (v. 21).” This was an official calling of the Son, who is part of the Triune Godhead, to an individual. The outcome of the story was that the young man went away sad. The young man resisted Christ’s calling because he was unwilling to pay the price required by Christ. Jesus told him to sell all of his possessions, but even though he felt a longing and desire to follow Jesus, he would not part with his material wealth.

The fifth and last point of Calvinism is perseverance of the saints, or eternal security. This doctrine teaches that there is nothing that can cause any of the elect to fall from their election. It is a logical conclusion to come to if God elects those who are to be saved and if His calling is irresistible. Calvinists find comfort in this part of their theology. It tells them that even though they are depraved and still in sin, no matter how bad they transgress, they cannot lose



God's favor. Most do not try to use this as an open excuse to sin, but rather as a source of comfort when they inadvertently sin. This doctrine gives them a positive world view that no matter how out of control the world may seem, God always is in control and He will protect His elect.

The Word of God gives several different scriptures that Calvinists use to support their doctrine of eternal security. "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39)." If none of these things can separate us from the love of God, what makes us think that our will can resist Him? "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand (John 10:28-29)." If we are in Christ, no power is strong enough to take us away from Him.

The Canons of Dordt say this about eternal security:

#### Article 6

But God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose in election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people, even in their melancholy falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption, and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death; nor does He permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.<sup>xxx</sup>

The Arminians believe that it is possible to fall from grace. They do not believe that any outside coercion can force an individual away from God, but if we have free will, then it must be possible that we can lose our election. There are several scripture passages that seem to imply this. "If one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back,

remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins (Jam. 5:19-20).” This is speaking of someone who is already saved leaving the community of Christ. Since someone must bring him or her back in order to save him or her from death, then it must be possible that the person who wandered away can fall from his or her election. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes about people who have been redeemed falling away (Hebrews 6:4-6). Judas Iscariot, called personally by Christ to be an apostle, part of Jesus’ inner circle of followers, betrayed Jesus and had this said about him: “But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born (Matt. 26:24).”

There is some contradiction in the Calvinistic theology of perseverance of the saints that makes it difficult to believe. This difficulty comes from the fact that they use the terminology “eternal security.” Calvinism teaches that it is possible for someone who is not elect to fully believe that they are elect. Calvin himself said that:

Experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected in a way so similar to the elect, that even in their own judgement there is no difference between them . . . It is correctly said, that the reprobate believe God to be propitious to them, inasmuch as they accept the gift of reconciliation, though confusedly and without true discernment.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Following Calvin’s statement here, there are some people who are not among the elect who experience the same things in this life as the elect, and who believe that they are, indeed, among the elect. If this is the case, then an individual can never be sure whether they are among the elect or not. If there is no definite assurance, then it seems more appropriate to call this theology “insecurity,” not security.

Having looked at each of the five points of Calvinism and Arminianism, we now come to a dilemma. We have seen how scripture supports both, but can both be true? Logic says no.

“The teachings of these creeds are so diametrically opposed to each other that both cannot be right. One must be wrong.”<sup>xxxii</sup> But if one is wrong, can we trust any scripture? Are we not taught that scripture does not contradict itself, and that it is all useful for instructing? How do we resolve these problems?

The simplest way is by pointing out that God’s system of logic is different than our own. “The foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength (1 Cor. 1:25).” God is not confined within the limits of our logic. Just because something isn’t logical to us doesn’t mean that it is outside of God’s ability to do. God, in His eternal state, is not bound by the limits of time as we are. From our perspective, salvation is a process. First, we are depraved; then we are saved by God’s grace and our sins are forgiven. As we walk in Christ, we become sanctified. If we wander from the truth, then we risk forfeiting our election. God, dwelling outside of the Space/Time Continuum, sees us in our completed form. He sees us without sin, as if righteousness was imputed, because in our development within time, He imparted righteousness to us. He sees us as we ultimately are upon death, which is why from His perspective our state of election or reprobation is eternal and predetermined. How all of this works, I don’t understand, but I quote Paul when I say:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> Wesley, John, “The Question, ‘What is an Arminian?’ Answered,” (<http://www.gbgm-umc.org/UMHistory/Wesley/arminian.html>, Nampa, ID: Wesley Center for Applied Theology, 1999).
- <sup>ii</sup> Seaton, W.J, “The Five Points of Calvinism,” (<http://www.gospelcom.net/thehighway/FivePoints.html>, Gospel Communications Network).
- <sup>iii</sup> McKinley, O. Glenn, Where Two Creeds Meet, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1959), P. 17.
- <sup>iv</sup> Armstrong, Brian G., “Calvin, John,” The Encyclopedia of Religion, V. 3, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987).
- <sup>v</sup> Yocum, Dr. Dale, Creeds in Contrast, (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishing Co., Inc., 1986), Pp. 14-18.
- <sup>vi</sup> Seaton.
- <sup>vii</sup> Wesley.
- <sup>viii</sup> Seaton.
- <sup>ix</sup> Wesley.
- <sup>x</sup> “Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary,” (<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary>, Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2000).
- <sup>xi</sup> The Canons of Dordt, “Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine,” ([http://www.gospelcom.net/thehighway/dordt2.html#THIRD AND FOURTH HEADS OF DOCTRINE](http://www.gospelcom.net/thehighway/dordt2.html#THIRD_AND_FOURTH_HEADS_OF_DOCTRINE), Dordrecht, Netherlands: The National Synod of the Reformed Church, 1618-19).
- <sup>xii</sup> Wesley.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Arminius, James, Public Disputations, “Disputation 11: On the Free Will of Man and Its Powers,” ([http://wesley.nnc.edu/Arminius/J.htm#DISPUTATION 11](http://wesley.nnc.edu/Arminius/J.htm#DISPUTATION_11), Leyden, Netherlands, 1603-09).
- <sup>xiv</sup> Manual 1997-2001 Church of the Nazarene, “Church Constitution; Articles of Faith; 5.1,” (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1997), Pp. 27-28.
- <sup>xv</sup> The Canons of Dordt.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Manual, “Church Constitution; Articles of Faith; 7,” P. 29.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Lodahl, Michael, The Story of God, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), P. 45.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Lewis, C.S., The Great Divorce, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1946), P. 122.
- <sup>xix</sup> Lodahl, P. 73.
- <sup>xx</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Denise, Peterfreund, and White, Great Traditions in Ethics, (Boston: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1999), P. 75.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Ibid, P. 92.

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<sup>xxiii</sup> Seaton.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxv</sup> The Canons of Dordt, “First Head of Doctrine.”

<sup>xxvi</sup> Seaton.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The Canons of Dordt, “Second Head of Doctrine.”

<sup>xxix</sup> Lodahl, P. 81.

<sup>xxx</sup> The Canons of Dordt, “Fifth Head of Doctrine.”

<sup>xxxi</sup> Yocum, P. 135.

<sup>xxxii</sup> McKinley, P. 17.

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