

28 The Reformation 2 - A History II

We previously looked at the disagreement that developed and is still very prevalent in the church today—the built-in tension between Free Will & Sovereign Grace. There is the need to lay a strong foundation before we get into the five points of Calvin and Arminius.

As we progress through the history and get into the five points, it will be clear to you that I personally have always had a strong proclivity toward the Calvinist view and the foundational perspective of what we today would refer to as Reformed Theology.

It is my view that if you don't believe in your heart-of-hearts that your salvation is entirely God's doing, then you will also struggle at some point in your life with your assurance of salvation and your security as a child of God. Those struggles leave our spirit-world enemies an open door to accuse us in ways that will ultimately impact—

- our personal worth
- our individual value

J.I. Packer stated: *Arminianism made man's salvation depend ultimately on man himself, saving faith being viewed throughout as man's own work and, because his own, not God's [work] in him.*

Out of the Synod of Dort in 1618, the members concluded that the Arminian view was contrary to Scripture and they reiterated the Reformers view that: *Salvation is a work of grace from beginning to end; in no sense did they believe that the sinner saved himself or contributed to his salvation. Adam's fall had completely ruined the race. All men were by nature spiritually dead and their wills were in bondage to sin and Satan. The ability to believe the gospel was itself a gift from God, bestowed only upon those whom He had chosen to be the objects of His unmerited favor. It was not man, but God, who determined which sinners would be shown mercy and saved.*

The five Arminius/Calvin points ultimately came to be referred to as “**TULIP**” as a letter-reference to the sum of each point. Before we delve into the acronym, let's first lay more foundation about the will of God. I'll begin by first asking you two questions...

Q.#1 - Is God omnipotent (unlimited power & authority)? If you think yes... would you agree that... If God is omnipotent, having unlimited power & authority, then He can and will achieve all that He purposed?

Q. #2 - Is God omniscient (all knowing)? If you think yes... would you agree that... He won't make any mistakes and will never have to alter His original purpose unless it is prudent to a process in His purpose—such as stopping the sun for one day for Joshua?

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. —Acts 15:18

To be more specific... whatever comes to pass in history only happens if it fits with God's eternal plan and purpose. If anything takes place in our world that is contrary to the Will of God then Satan and/or man is equal to, even superior to, God the Father and we know that isn't true. God is truly a free agent—free to serve His own pleasure.

The Reformers were unified on the belief that salvation is:

- by grace alone
- through faith alone
- in Christ alone

But early-on the debate turned to “why we believe what we believe!” The Reformers parted ways with the Catholic church again with their *Sola Scriptura*—“we believe in the absolute and final authority of the Scriptures.” Eugene Peterson translates well this passage from 2 Timothy 3, from his translation, *The Message*: *There’s nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.*

But there remained, and remains, a debate about *Sola Scriptura*. The Catholic church agreed on Creation but at the Council of Trent in the mid-1500s, in addition to the authority of Scripture, they added the authority held in “the Traditions of the Church.”

So... the debate language had to progress to:

- by sovereign grace alone
- through God-given faith alone
- in the Lord Jesus Christ alone
- according to God’s Word alone

And... the gap between Catholic and Evangelical widened.

Luther wrote: “*Justification by faith alone is the article on which the church stands or falls.*”

Calvin wrote: “*Justification by faith alone is the hinge on which everything in Christianity turns.*”

Charles Ryrie wrote: *Liberalism has certainly made human reason the judge of truth and often the creator of truth... the Bible then is viewed as the product of human reasoning containing man’s thoughts about God, himself, and this world... and is not, as conservatives believe, the record of a message from a transcendent (supreme) God who broke into the course of history.*

The very first article in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* states: *It pleased the Lord at different times and in various ways to reveal Himself and to declare that this revelation contains His will for His church. Afterwards it pleased God to put this entire revelation into writing so that the truth might be better preserved and transmitted and that the church, confronted with the corruption of the flesh and the evil purposes of Satan and the world, might be more securely established and comforted.*

The first article concludes: *The Holy Spirit speaking in the Bible is the supreme judge of all religious controversies, all decisions, all religious councils, all the opinions of ancient writers, all human teachings, and every private opinion. We are to be satisfied with the judgment of Him Who is and can be the only judge.*

And here is what Scripture has shown us about Almighty God, who is the only agent in the universe who is not influenced by any outside force or creature.

We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps. —Proverbs 16:9

And do not forget the things I have done throughout history. For I am God—I alone! I am God, and there is no one else like me. Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish. —Isaiah 46:9-10

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Here then is a very brief description of the five points. The following five Musings will go into greater detail on the differing perspectives between the Calvinist and Armenian views about these five of our basic convictions as Christian believers.

#1 - Free Will vs. Total Depravity

Arminius believed that the fall of man was not total and that there was enough good left in man for him to will to accept Christ unto Salvation. Man can choose and salvation is man's work of faith.

Calvin acknowledged that man had a will but agreed with Luther that man's will was in bondage to Satan... And man is lost until God gives him life and with that life comes the faith to believe.

#2 - Conditional Election vs. Unconditional Election

Arminius taught that election was conditional and based on the foreknowledge of God as to who would believe. In other words man's act of faith was the "condition" for being elected to eternal life.

Calvin taught that election is the result of God's free will alone apart from anything done by a spiritually-dead man.

#3 - Universal Atonement vs. Limited Atonement

Arminians believe that Christ died to save no one in particular, but died for those who exercise their free will and accept his offer of redemption. Those who do not choose to accept His offer will go to hell.

Calvin believed that Christ died for particular persons who were given to Him by the Father in eternity past. All He chose before the foundation of the world and will be saved. All He did not choose will receive "justice" from God and are cast into hell.

#4 - Obstructable Grace vs. Irresistible Grace

Arminians believe that although the Holy Spirit seeks to woo all men to Christ, since He loves all men, the Spirit of God can be resisted by man if man chooses to resist.

Calvin believed that the grace of God cannot be obstructed. Since God initiates salvation by giving men the gift of life known as Regeneration—then man's renewed human spirit is born again and drawn irresistibly to God the Father.

#5 - Fall From Grace vs. Perseverance of the Saints

To the Arminian it is logical that if it is man's choice to be saved, then man can also choose to change his mind and return to a state of being lost and apart from God. Some believe that degrees of sin can cause a man to fall from grace and return to a lost condition.

The Calvinist replies quite simply that since salvation is entirely a work of the Lord, then staying saved is also a work of the Lord and that God will finish the work He has begun in His children.

Next: Musing 29 The Reformation 3 will take a deeper look at, "T" — Total Depravity