

Arminianism

Arminianism is a theological perspective formulated by Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius and his historic followers. He lived in the late 16th and early 17th centuries of the reformation period and served as a professor of theology and wrote many books and articles. He was taught by Theodore Beza the successor of John Calvin and began to question the reformed understanding of predestination where God unconditionally elects some to Salvation and not all. After his death the five articles of the Remonstrance were formulated as a statement of faith that would later become known as Arminianism.

1) Deprivation - That man does not possess saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as in his state of apostasy and sin he can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do any thing that is truly good (such as saving Faith eminently is); but that it is necessary that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, and will, and all his faculties, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the Word of Christ.

2) Conditional Predestination - God has immutably decreed, from eternity, to save those men who, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, believe in Jesus Christ, and by the same grace persevere in the obedience of faith to the end; and, on the other hand, to condemn the unbelievers and unconverted. Election and condemnation are thus conditioned by foreknowledge, and made dependent on the foreseen faith or unbelief of men.

3) Unlimited Atonement - Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, and his grace is extended to all. His atoning sacrifice is in and of itself sufficient for the redemption of the whole world, and is intended for all by God the Father. But its inherent sufficiency does not necessarily imply its actual efficiency. The grace of God may be resisted, and only those who accept it by faith are actually saved. He who is lost, is lost by his own guilt.

4) Resistible Grace - Grace is the beginning, continuation, and end of our spiritual life, so that man can neither think nor do any good or resist sin without preventing, co-operating, and assisting grace. But as for the manner of co-operation, this grace is not irresistible, for many resist the Holy Ghost.

5) Assurance and Security - Although grace is sufficient and abundant to preserve the faithful through all trials and temptations for life everlasting, it has not yet been proved from the Scriptures that grace, once given, can never be lost. On this point the disciples of Arminius went further, and taught the possibility of a total and final fall of believers from grace.

Deprivation or the fall of man is understanding the effects that original sin or the sin of Adam in eating the forbidden fruit have had on the human race. Arminius taught that man's depravity is total and affects his entire being. Because of the fall every aspect of human nature is tainted by sin including the will of man. Arminius declared that the free will of man towards the True Good is not only wounded, maimed, bent and weakened but is also imprisoned, destroyed and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace but it also has no power whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace. Thus the idea that Arminians believe that human free will survived the fall intact are false. It should be noted that many who came after moved away from Arminius's strong teaching on human depravity. Baptists, Methodists and Seventh day Adventists are denominations that hold to Arminian influence.

Free will under the Arminian system is far different than free will under the Calvinist system as we will discuss later. Arminian free will is creature centered and independent of God. They see grace as restoring free will so that humans for the first time have the ability to respond in faith to the grace of God or resist it in unrepentance and disbelief. Genuine free will is seen as the gift of God where for the first time they can say Yes or No to God. Outside influences do not affect how the will responds. Many in our day with these views see human decision or choice as the pivotal point in determining the response to Christ and his gospel invitation. They supplant genuine faith or belief in the gospel with choice. This leads to a legal religion where the human is elevated to the status of co-redeemer with God. And also ignores the many verses in the bible that declare God thru the Holy Spirit is constantly influencing us for good where Satan and his temptations are influencing us for evil.

Predestination and election which mean to determine beforehand or choose from ages past are conditional in the Arminian perspective. Arminius reacting from the Calvinist position of unconditional election believed that God chose for Salvation those whom he foresaw would have saving faith in Christ. This belief is centered around an individual's free will. Arminius argued that Christ's sacrificial death on the cross was for all humanity not just the elect so it would be impossible for him to elect individuals and then declare that the gospel is available to all. Arminians charge Calvinists with rejecting the many verses in the bible that declare the gospel is available to all humanity and that Christ is the savior of the world. I tend to agree with the Arminian position of predestination in that God who is all knowing saw from the beginning those who would have saving faith in Christ and wrote their names in the book of life. Jesus declared that many are called but few are chosen (elect). The elect realize the depths of sin they have been saved from and give all the glory to Christ while the non-elect are like Esau who were given the birthright (Salvation) but despise it and throw it away.

The Arminian atonement which means at-one-ment or reconciliation is unlimited or universal in scope. Christ's sacrificial death is on behalf of all men and benefits all humanity. God then elects for Salvation those whom he foresees will believe in Christ of their own free will. Christ's redeeming work though universal and applicable to all men is seen as making a possibility for Salvation which is conditioned upon man's free will. Thus the Arminian atonement is provisional and does not actually save anyone at the cross but merely provides a way or opportunity to be saved. On this point I must part company with Arminians because how could Jesus be called the savior of the world if he didn't actually save anyone? A possibility of Salvation is no Salvation at all if sinners have to bridge the gap between death and life everlasting. The bible declares that we have received a finished atonement and the last words of Christ on the cross were 'it is finished'. The gospel invitation that goes to all the world is that the world has been saved, past tense, 2000 years ago by the life, death and resurrection of Christ. We either accept a finished Salvation by faith or reject a finished Salvation by unbelief.

Resistible grace or Synergism is the position that Salvation involves some sort of cooperation between divine grace and human free will. Many Arminians distance themselves from being labeled as synergistic because of their belief in total depravity but because of their strong stance on independent free will are nonetheless within the definition. Grace that is communicated by the Holy Spirit can be resisted and thwarted by man in the Arminian understanding. Thus man's free will limits the Holy Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. I would classify myself as a monergistic in that I believe that it is God who works at bringing the sinner to repentance and conversion independently of the human agent. The one condition in the bible for Salvation is belief and even faith is spoken of as a gift so at the end of the day all the glory goes to God. We are saved by grace thru faith and not of ourselves it is the gift of God.

Conditional security is the belief that persevering faith is what keeps believers secure in Christ. Arminians cite the many examples in the bible of believers who started out in the faith but then fell away from Christ. In our day Arminian or hyper-Arminian proponents are so focused on apostasy that they trust in their will or efforts in staying secure with Christ. Apostasy is a very real danger but the focus should always be on Christ and his power to keep all those that belong to him. In the parable of the sower Jesus gave four examples of believers though the first may or may not have been a believer with at least two groups who 'fell away' because of persecution or cares of this world and riches. Only the last group reached maturity and bore fruit. So we must conclude that some believers or babes in Christ can and often do fall away but mature Christians who are trained to discern both good and evil do not fall away.