

ARMINIANISM AND CALVINISM: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

John 6:36-59

by Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Within Protestantism there are two different views on the doctrine of salvation – Arminianism and Calvinism. Within the Southern Baptist Convention, you can find both.
2. Arminianism is named after Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch theologian. Calvinism is named after the theologian John Calvin (1509-1564), a French theologian.
3. Both systems of theology can be summarized with five points.
 - i. The FACTS of Arminianism:
 1. Freed to Believe by God’s Grace. God enables us to believe in Christ, but we have the ability to reject Him.
 2. Atonement for All. Christ died for everyone.
 3. Conditional Election. God chooses to save those who believe in Jesus Christ.
 4. Total Depravity. Lost people cannot turn to Christ without God’s prevenient grace.
 5. Security in Christ. When God saves you, He will hold you securely and not allow you to fall away.
 - ii. The TULIP of Calvinism:
 1. Total Depravity. Lost people cannot turn to Christ without God’s prevenient grace.
 2. Unconditional Election. Before time, God chose to save some apart from faith, and the rest He sends to hell.
 3. Limited Atonement. Christ only died for the elect – those God chose to save before time.
 4. Irresistible Grace. God’s prevenient (enabling) grace irresistibly draws the elect to Christ.
 5. Perseverance of the Saints. When God saves you, He will hold you securely and not allow you to fall away.
4. Whichever doctrine of salvation you adhere to will determine how you view salvation, God, people, the lost, evangelism, the church, etc.
5. Today we will explore some of the differences between Arminianism and Calvinism by looking at one of the best passages that covers many of the questions in the debate: John 6:36-59. I want to point out five truths about salvation in this passage, and each one will help us to see the differences and similarities. We’re not going to cover every verse in this passage due to time limitations.

II. FIVE TRUTHS ABOUT SALVATION

1. Salvation is only given to some.

- i. **John 6:36-37** “36 But as I told you, you’ve seen me, and yet you do not believe. 37 Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out.”
- ii. Calvinists believe that verse 37 is proof of unconditional election and irresistible grace. They interpret it like this:
 1. The Father has chosen a select few to give to Jesus (i.e. the elect); these He irresistibly draws to Jesus for salvation. Those who don’t believe, such as the Jews, do not believe because God hasn’t chosen them.
 2. A Calvinist translation of v. 37 might go something like this: The Father has chosen a few to be saved, and they will be gifted with the faith to believe and irresistibly drawn to Christ for salvation.
 3. Reformation Study Bible “God leads to faith all whom He plans to redeem. The redemption of the elect is certain, since it is secured by the sovereign purpose and invincible power of God Himself to draw them to the Son and secure them in His hand.”
 4. In other words, first God chooses to give some to Christ for salvation, unconditionally, and then they believe.
- iii. The Arminian interpretation is different. God chooses to give those who believe to Christ for salvation. In other words, God chooses to give to the Son all who believe, rather than choosing a select few and then enabling them to believe.
- iv. Let’s look at the text more closely.
- v. **John 6:37a** “Everyone the Father gives me will come to me.”
 1. “Everyone the Father gives me” = All who believe in Jesus Christ.
 - a. John 6:39-40 equates those given to the Son with those who believe in Him.
 - i. **John 6:39-40** “39 This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
 - b. It is true that the Father only gives some to the Son. But who does He give? And why does He choose them? Calvinists claim that He chooses a few arbitrarily and unconditionally. Arminians say that God chooses the few who meet the condition of faith.
 2. “Will come to me” = Will be saved (will come into My kingdom).

- i. One of the mistakes that Calvinists make, I believe, is to say that the word “come” in this verse is the same as in verse 35, where it clearly means “to believe.”
 - 1. John 6:35 “I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again.”
- ii. However, “come” in 6:35 is different that this word “come” in 6:37a.
 - 1. 6:35 (37b, 44, 45) -- *Erchomai* emphasizes the process of coming – to believe.
 - 2. 6:37a – *Heko* emphasizes the idea of reaching or arriving – final salvation, or entering the kingdom of heaven, or being welcomed into heaven, or receiving your final salvation – a glorified body.
 - 3. We see this second use of “come” (*heko*) used in this way in a couple of statements by Jesus (see also Lk 13:29).
 - a. **Matthew 8:11** “I tell you that many will come (*heko*) from east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”
- vi. So, the Calvinist interpretation of 37a is, “Everyone the Father chooses will believe.” But the Arminian interpretation is, “All who believe in Jesus Christ will be saved.”
 - 1. “Everyone the Father gives me” = All who believe in Jesus Christ (v. 39-40).
 - 2. “Will come to me” = will be saved / will come into my kingdom.
- vii. Jesus’ response to the unbelief of the Jews was that He understood that not everyone will be saved. This did not shock Him. He knew that God has chosen to save only some – those who believe in Jesus Christ.
 - 1. **Matthew 7:14** “How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.”

2. Salvation will not be withheld to the one who believes in Christ.

- i. **John 6:37b** And the one who comes to me I will never cast out.
 - 1. “The one who comes to me” = The one who believes in me.
 - a. *Erchomai*. Same as in John 6:35, 44, 45. Different word that *heko* in 6:37a.
 - 2. “I will never cast out” = I will not reject them for salvation.
 - a. John 6:37 “Cast out”, *ekballo exo*.

- b. **Luke 13:27-28** “But he will say, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you’re from. Get away from me, all you evildoers!’
28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in that place, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves thrown out (*ekballo exo*).”
 - i. This verse does not mean that they will be thrown out of heaven, but that they will be kept out. They will be denied entrance.
 - ii. The thought of this phrase is that those who believe in Jesus will not be rejected. He will not deny you. He will not withhold Himself from you. Those who believe in Christ will be saved, no matter who you are, or what you have done.
 - iii. Calvinists would agree with this interpretation, but they would say that only some can believe because Christ didn’t die for everyone, only the elect. And God only makes salvation available to the elect.
 - iv. But Arminians would argue that everyone can come to Christ, not just a select few. Anyone can be saved. Anyone can come to Christ in faith and not be rejected. We believe this because of three two clear teachings in the Bible:
 - 1. God wants everyone to be saved. **1 Timothy 2:3-4** “3 This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
 - 2. Christ died to save everyone. **1 Timothy 2:5-6** “5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time.”
 - 3. It doesn’t make sense for God to want to save everyone, and to send Christ to die for everyone, but to only make salvation available to a few.

3. Salvation cannot be lost.

- i. One of the differences between Baptists and Wesleyans (followers of John Wesley) is the subject of eternal security. Once you are saved, can you lose your salvation?
 - 1. Wesleyans say yes; that to inherit eternal life you must continue to believe throughout your life.
 - 2. Baptists disagree. You must continue to believe throughout your life, but because what God has done in your life through salvation, in radically transforming your heart and giving you the indwelling Holy Spirit, you will continue to believe. You will persevere in faith to the end because Christ has you in His hand. This is called the doctrine of eternal security, or the perseverance of the saints.

3. On this point Arminians and Calvinists agree, although some Arminians believe that you can lose your salvation.
 - ii. **John 6:39-40** “This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father; that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
 1. “Those he has given me” is equated with “everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him.”
 2. “Raise them up on the last day.”
 - a. The final resurrection when Christ returns and gives all believers their eternal, sinless, perfect, glorified bodies.
 - b. **Philippians 3:20-21** “20 Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.”
 - iii. Salvation cannot be lost. This is reiterated by the Lord in John 10.
 1. **John 10:27-29** “27 My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”
- 4. Salvation is only possible through prevenient grace.**
- i. **John 6:44** “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
 1. “No one can come to me” = No one can believe in Jesus.
 - a. Come, erchomai, believe. Same as in John 6:35.
 - b. “Unless the Father who sent me draws him” = Unless the Father enables him.
 - i. The Father’s “drawing,” or prevenient grace, is described in various ways:
 1. **Roger Olson** “Prevenient grace is simply the convicting, calling, enlightening and enabling grace of God that goes before conversion and makes repentance and faith possible.”
 - ii. Both Calvinists and Arminians believe in the doctrine of total depravity. Lost people are enslaved to sin and Satan; they worship themselves and the things of this world. They will not and cannot repent and believe in Jesus Christ without God’s prevenient (enabling) grace.
 1. **Roger Olson** “Arminianism teaches that all humans are born morally and spiritual deprived, and helpless to do anything good or worthy in

God's sight without a special infusion of God's grace to overcome the affects of original sin."

2. **Romans 3:10-12** "as it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one."
- iii. Calvinists accuse Arminians of believing in free will, but it would be more accurate to say that we believe in *freed* will. Apart from God's prevenient grace, our will is not free; we are under bondage. But God graciously frees our will so that we can respond to the gospel.
 1. **Adam Clarke** (Methodist) "Unless God thus draw, no man will ever come to Christ; because none could, without this drawing, ever feel the need of a Saviour."
- iv. Calvinists also claim that they believe that salvation is all of grace from start to finish, and accuse Arminians of believing that salvation is a partnership between God and man (God does His part, and man does His). Thus, Arminians are said to rob God of His glory in salvation. But this is not the case. Arminians believe that salvation is all of grace as well. We believe that without the prevenient, enabling grace of God, mankind will not and cannot respond in faith to the gospel. We believe that even the ability to put our faith in Christ is a gift of God.
- v. Two debates exist over God's drawing:
 1. Who does the Father draw?
 2. Is the Father's drawing irresistible?
- vi. Who does the Father draw – everyone, or only some?
 1. Calvinists believe that God only draws some – the elect; those whom He has already chosen to save. God only chooses to save some; these are the elect; and these are the ones that are drawn by the Father.
 2. Arminians believe that God draws all men to Christ. Why?
 - a. The Bible explicitly says that the Father will draw all men to Himself through the death of Christ.
 - i. **John 12:32** "As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself."
 - ii. "Draw" in this verse is the exact same Greek word used in John 6:44, *elko*.
 - b. God is love (1 John 4:8).
 - i. He wants and does what is best for people.
 - ii. It wouldn't make sense for a loving God not to draw people and give them a chance to be saved.
 - c. God desires the salvation of all people.

- i. **2 Peter 3:9** “The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.”
 - ii. It wouldn’t make sense for God to desire the salvation of all people but not draw them for salvation.
 - d. Christ died for the salvation of all people.
 - i. **1 John 2:2** “He himself is the atoning sacrifice, for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.”
 - 3. In a sense, Arminians to believe in irresistible grace. God’s grace is irresistible in the sense that you can’t stop God from drawing you, but it is resistible in the sense that you can reject His appeals to accept Christ.
 - vii. This brings us to the last point. Is the Father’s drawing irresistible? No.

5. Salvation is conditioned upon belief in Jesus Christ.

- i. Calvinists believe in irresistible grace; that the drawing of the Father to the Son cannot be resisted. In fact, they believe in pre-faith regeneration. First, a person is born again, and then they put their faith in Christ. In a sense, Calvinists believe that first you are saved, and then you believe. First you receive new life, and then you believe.
 - 1. **R.C. Sproul** “A cardinal point of Reformed theology [Calvinism] is the maxim: “Regeneration precedes faith.” Our nature is so corrupt, the power of sin is so great, that unless God does a supernatural work in our souls we will never choose Christ. We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again in order to believe. (*Chosen By God*, pg. 72)”
- ii. Arminians believe that God’s drawing is resistible. That God draws us to Him, freeing our will to believe, but then we have the responsibility to accept or reject Christ.
- iii. There are several of reasons why I believe God’s grace is resistible.
 - 1. First, the wording of John 6:44 does not say that all who are drawn by the Father are saved. It simply says that no one can be saved without being drawn to the Father. No one can come without being drawn, and the one who comes will be saved.
 - 2. Second, the word “draw” in John 6:44 does not mean “to force.”
 - a. R.C. Sproul is quoted as saying that the Greek word for “draw” is defined in Kittle’s Theological Dictionary as “to compel by irresistible superiority.”
 - b. But if you actually look up the word in Kittle’s, **Geoffrey Bromiley** writes, “This is the point in the two important passages in John 6:44; 12:32. There is no thought here of

force or magic. The term figuratively expresses the supernatural power of the love of God or Christ which goes out to all (12:32) but without which no one can come (6:44) [p. 227].”

3. Third, the context shows that salvation is conditioned upon the response of man.
 - a. **John 6:45** “It is written in the Prophets: And they will all be taught by God., Everyone who has listened to and learned from the Father comes to me”
 - i. “And they will be taught by God.”
 1. Jesus was quoting the prophet Isaiah 54:13.
 2. In other words, God will teach (draw) all men. This drawing is universal.
 - ii. “Everyone who has listened to and learned from the Father comes to me.”
 1. Everyone is taught by the Father, but only those who “listen to and learn from the Father” will believe in Christ for salvation.
 - iii. God does the drawing, but this drawing is not irresistible.
 1. He frees our will and enables us to repent and believe. But we must not resist His drawing.
 2. We are freed to believe, not forced to believe.
4. Fourth, this entire discourse makes it very clear that faith precedes life.
 - a. Calvinists believe in pre-faith regeneration. God gives you life, and then you believe. But this passage, and the entire Bible does not support this. Rather, it is the opposite. Faith precedes life.
 - b. **John 6:35** “I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again.”
 - c. **John 6:40** “For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life.”
 - d. **John 6:47** “Truly I tell you, anyone who believes has eternal life.”
5. Fifth, Christ says that salvation is conditioned upon faith, the command to believe implies the ability to respond.
 - a. **John 6:47** “Truly I tell you, anyone who believes has eternal life.”
6. Sixth, other verses in the Bible show that grace is resistible.

- a. **Matthew 23:37** “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”
- iv. **BW Johnson**, *The People’s New Testament* “Two things are needful to come to Christ, the human will to come and the divine drawing (see John 5:40; Matt. 23:37; Rev. 22:17). God “draws” by the gospel. “It is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). If our will consents, so that we yield to the drawing, we will come to Christ.”
- v. We must trust in the cross of Jesus Christ for our salvation.

III. CONCLUSION

1. In summary, the best interpretation of this passage leans heavily toward Arminianism.
 - i. Salvation is only given to some. In this we are agreement with Calvinists. The question is who are the “some”?
 1. Calvinists say God elects unconditionally, and then the elect believe.
 2. Arminians would say that God’s election is conditionally based on His foreknowledge of who will believe (Rm 8:29; 1 Pt 1:1-2).
 - ii. Salvation will never be denied to those who believe. In this we can agree.
 1. But Calvinists say that God only allows some to believe, so that the offer and possibility of salvation is only extended to some.
 2. Arminians say that the offer and possibility of salvation is for all people.
 - iii. Salvation cannot be lost. In this we are agreed.
 - iv. Salvation is only possible through prevenient grace. In this we are agreed, but to whom does God extend His prevenient, drawing grace?
 1. Calvinists would say only some – the elect.
 2. Arminians would say it is extended to all.
 - v. Salvation is conditional upon belief in Christ.
 1. Calvinists would agree with this statement, but they would say that God’s prevenient grace is irresistible, so that the elect cannot fail to meet the condition of faith.
 2. Arminians believe that God’s grace is resistible, so that each person is free to accept or reject Christ, and will be held responsible for that decision.