

ARE WE PREDESTINED TO SALVATION?A LOOK AT THE CALVINIST'S ARGUMENT.

Two schools of theological thought, Calvinism and Arminianism, have been at odds with one another at least since the 16th Century. In 1610, one year after the death of James Arminius, five articles of faith based on his teachings were drawn up by his followers. The purpose of these articles was to submit them to the state of Holland in the form of a "Remonstrance" (i.e. a protest), against the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism. The Arminians objected to those doctrines held in the Confession and Catechism relating to divine sovereignty, human inability, unconditional election and predestination, particular redemption, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints. The Arminians wanted the Church of Holland to revise these doctrines.

In 1618 at the Synod of Dort convened by the States-General of Holland, the five points of Arminianism were rejected. In turn, the Synod set forth the five points of Calvinism, named after John Calvin who had spent a considerable amount of time expounding and defending these doctrinal issues.

However, Arminian beliefs didn't die out at the Synod in 1618. Today, Arminianism is still a strong belief, held by many, although so-called "Arminians" don't necessarily hold to all five of the doctrines set forth in 1610.

The issues of Arminianism and Calvinism center around whether God sovereignly predestined peoples' eternal destinies or whether humans choose their own eternal destiny. This is precisely the issue I wish to focus this paper on. However, in order to consider this issue, we need to first of all discuss the doctrines held by both parties.

Arminians hold that man has free will or human ability to choose his own eternal destiny. They claim that human nature was affected by the Fall, but that man is not in total spiritual helplessness. In other words, the sinner's will is not enslaved to sinful nature, but he is able to choose good over evil in spiritual matters. God enables men to repent and believe in Him, but He does not interfere with their human freedom as to whether they do so or not. Therefore, the Arminians hold that man has the ability to believe and accept Christ. Whereas, the Calvinists hold that man is totally depraved or unable to choose his own eternal destiny. They claim that because of the Fall, man is in bondage to his evil nature and therefore cannot choose good over evil or savingly believe the Gospel. Calvinists hold that man is unable to believe or accept Christ.

Secondly, Arminians hold to conditional election. Election is based upon God foreseeing the sinners who would respond to His call. Therefore, election is determined by what man would do. Calvinists, however, hold to unconditional election. In this case election is based upon God's sovereign will and therefore God gives faith and repentance to those whom He selects. God's choice of the sinner is the ultimate cause of salvation.

Thirdly, Arminians hold to universal redemption or general atonement. Christ's redeeming work makes it possible for everyone to be saved, but does not secure salvation for anyone. Therefore, Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it. Calvinists, on the other hand, hold to particular redemption or limited atonement. Christ's redeeming work was intended to only save the elect and also secured the elects' salvations.

Fourthly, Arminians hold to the doctrine that the Holy Spirit's conviction (John 16:8) can be effectively resisted. The Holy Spirit



does all He can to bring the sinner to salvation, but the sinner's free will can resist the Spirits working. Calvinists hold to the doctrine of the efficacious call of the Spirit or Irresistable grace. The Holy Spirit gives the elect both an outward call and an inward call.<sup>1</sup> The inward call cannot be rejected by the sinner. The Spirit causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come willingly and freely to Christ.

Finally, Arminians hold that believers can lose their salvation by failing to keep up the faith.<sup>2</sup> This doctrine is termed, falling from grace. Calvinists, on the other hand, hold to perseverance of the saints. The elect are eternally saved and can never lose their salvation.

In order to further investigate the issue of who ultimately chooses our eternal destinies, Us or God, we first have to settle whether man is able to even choose God. One of the key elements of Calvinist doctrine is the issue of total depravity. Their argument is that since men are not capable of any good thing, even the act of faith must be done for them. We should note that this statement holds a hidden assumption; that faith is a good work. Total depravity is a point that can easily become philosophical speculation. So we should take great pains to stay scriptural. Is it possible that one could be an Arminian, believe in man's choice of salvation, and still hold to total depravity? Answering this question in the affirmative would lend weight to the Arminian arguments since there

1. The outward call is a general call extended to all, but will not bring a sinner to Christ. It's the Gospel message itself. But the inward call is extended only to the elect, where the Holy Spirit performs a work of grace within the sinner, which inevitably brings him to faith in Christ.

2. All Arminians have not agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ, and that once a sinner is regenerated he can never lose his salvation.

is such a strong Biblical case for total depravity. To do this, we would have to demonstrate that 1) God gives all men faith, it is simply a matter of where or whom they place it in. 2) That placing their faith in God is not a good work, so even a fallen individual may do so, especially because 3) God is drawing all men to place their faith in Him.

First of all we need to consider whether God gives all men the gift of faith. Scripture seems to indicate that this is so. In John 6:29,30 the multitude is asking Christ for a sign, "So that we may see and believe in you. . ." This scripture shows that they had the ability to believe but were not presently using it. In another passage in John (17:2) Christ is praying for the disciples and asks the Father, "that they may be one. . .that the world may believe that God did send Me." This scripture here indicates that the "world" is capable of putting their faith in God. These two passages here indicate that God gives faith to everyone, not just a select few. (Unless of course, the multitude or the world are all His chosen few.<sup>3</sup>). Furthermore, there are a number of passages that demonstrate that people believe in other things (i.e. idols) for their salvation. (see: Hab. 2:18; Jer. 17:5; Ex 33:13; Ps 118:8; Prov. 11:28; Num. 14:11; Ps 44:6; Ps 49:6,7). If people are capable of believing in other things for their salvation, or what have you, then it seems plausible to conclude that everyone is capable of believing in God for salvation. Also in John 5:45,46 where Christ is speaking to the Jews, He says ". . .Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me." Here Christ indicates that the Jews had believed in (the law of) Moses,

3. Calvinists claim that the term "world" has limited meanings. (i.e. believers all over the world, or the believing Gentiles, etc.) This seems to be a far-fetched meaning of the word and more than likely, a gross misrepresentation of the term.



and again we see that the Jews were capable of belief, although they weren't saved.

The weight of scripture seems to lean towards the idea that God gives everyone faith. However, we need to consider the defense of the Calvinist's argument. To back up their idea that God gives only a select few the gift of faith, they only can cite four scriptures: Rom. 12:3; I Cor. 12:9; Eph. 2:8,9 and II Thess. 3:2. (It should be noted that this final scripture, II Thess. 3:2, I have not found in any of my readings of Calvinism concerning this issue. So, even the Calvinists don't resort to this one.). In the first two passages listed, Rom. 12:3 and I Cor. 12:9, the first thing to note is that the context of both of these are, that Paul is speaking to Christians about spiritual gifts and the function of the Body of Christ. So, both passages are speaking of doing godd workd in the Body. When Paul says, " as God has alloted each a measure of faith," (Rom. 12:3) or "to another faith by the same spirit" (I Cor. 12:9) it is ~~is~~ likely that he is not referring to a saving faith, but rather the measure of faith is equal to the size or strength of the spiritual gift received. Therefore, God's sovereignty is in choosing the spiritual gifts He gives us, rather than sovereignly deciding who He gives faith to.

Another scripture the Calvinist uses to support this argument is Eph. 2:8,9, where Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." Here the Calvinists claim that the "that" refers to both the "salvation" and to the "faith". Since salvation is only for the elect, the faith must also too be only for the elect. However, "in the original, the demonstrative "this" (or that) is neuter and does not correspond with the gender of the word "faith", which is feminine, it rather

refers to the act of being saved by grace, conditioned on our part of faith."<sup>4</sup> From this the Calvinist would have a hard time proving that the, "that not of yourselves" is referring to both salvation and faith. The "that" is more than likely just referring to the act of being saved. Especially key is the Pauline phrase, "that no one should boast." His usage elsewhere (Rom 3:27) of this phrase shows that excersising ones faith takes away boasting. So it would be logical and context would demand that this passage is saying salvation is a gift by faith, not works, so no one can boast.

Finally, the fourth scripture, II Thess. 3:2, where Paul sates ". . .and that we may be delievered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith." The context here is about false teachers and their danger because some of them didn't even believe in the Lord (2:10). So it could be that the phrase, "For not all have faith" is referring to the fact that these perverse and evil men did not have faith in God and therefore, Paul asks that we (Christians) may be delievered from them.

In summary, the weight of scripture leans towards the category that God gives all men faith, and does not select only a few for this gift. I would have to challenge the Calvinist, at this point, to bring forth more scriptures that teach that God gives faith to only a few chosen ones.

Secondly, we need to establish whether faith is a good work or not. The ground for the Calvinists argument of predestination is that man is so totally depraved and can do nothing of himself to achieve salvation and therefore God sovereignly elects those who He

4. New Testament Commentary, William Hendricksen, Baker Book House: Michigan, 1967, p. 121.



wishes to receive the gift of salvation. So our salvation or damnation is totally up to God, because we, as sinners can do no good work to achieve salvation--not even have faith in God, because faith is classified as a good work. Well, the weight of scripture agrees with the total depravity of mankind. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments there are many references to the complete wickedness of man, since the Fall. Furthermore, scripture also teaches that man can do nothing to achieve salvation. (See: Eph. 2:8,9; II Cor 3:5; Rom 3: 9-12; Matt. 7: 16-18, and so forth). However, how can we possibly classify faith as a good work? There are two reasons that it would be difficult to do so. First of all, scripture teaches that there is a distinction between the two. (See: Rom. 3:28; 4:5, 9: 30-32; Gal. 2:16, 4:11, Eph. 2:8,9). In all these scriptures faith and works are held in complete distinction from one another. Even in James 2:14-18 where James shows that works are a natural result of faith, still here a distinction is made between the two. James says, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." James is claiming here that faith without works is dead, but he doesn't claim that there is no faith--the faith is simply useless, dead, lifeless, etc. Secondly, we should note that the fact that one places faith in God does not mean that he sought God out or did some commendable act. Rather, it shows that God draws us, compels us, hunts us down and convicts us of our need for Him, (See: John 12:32, 16:8, Acts 2:39, Rom. 1:19) and we finally give in to Him. There is no hint of human effort in exercising the act of faith.

The Calvinists try to get around the obvious scriptures that claim that God calls everyone to have faith in Him, by stating that God gives all men an outward call and only the elect receive an inward call: The Gospel message itself is the outward call given to everyone and the inward call, which prepares the heart to receive

the Gospel, is given only to the elect. Where does scripture teach this? I have never come across any scripture that reveals that God uses an outward and inward call, depending upon whom He's dealing with. To maintain this Calvinist doctrine it seems one would have to resort to word games or manipulate some obvious scriptures in order for this argument to hold water.

Rather, we see in both the Old and the New Testaments, that God desires all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth through faith. In Ez. 18:32 the Lord says, "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies. . .therefore, repent and live." (See also Ez. 33:11). God obviously seeks the death of no one and calls them to repent and live. In Luke 2:10 an angel appeared to the shepherds in the fields, at the time of Christ's birth, saying ". . . I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people. . ." Why would the angel claim that this is a great joy for all the people, if only a select few were actually to experience salvation? (The great joy is obviously referring to salvation, see vs. 30,31). In John 1:7 John is to bear witness of the light, "that all might believe through Him," and in verse 9 the true light coming into the world "enlightens every man." The words "all" and "every" here indicate that God intends to save all men. Also in John chapter 4:42 the Samaritans claim that Christ is the "Savior of the World." (See also I Tim 4:10). It does not say here that Christ is the Savior for a few chosen ones, but rather it says that Christ is the Savior of the World! Another passage in John, Ch. 12:32 Christ says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." The word "draw" here indicates that Christ is intent on bringing all men close to Him--not just a few. Finally in John (16:8), we see that the Holy Spirit will "convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment." In other words, the Holy Spirit gives everyone an inner-



conviction about their sinfulness. In I Tim 2:4 Paul says of God that He "desires all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth." Here again the word "desires" indicates some intensity on Gods part that all men come to know Him. ( For further references that God desires all men to come to know Him, see: Acts 2:38-40, 3:26, 16:31, 17:11, 12:30, II Cor 5:15, Tit 2:11, Heb 2:9, II Pet 3:9, I John 2:2).

It would be difficult to get around these obvious scriptures that claim God desires all men to be saved and suggest that God calls only an elect few to salvation. The idea that God calls only an elect few can just not be harmonized with all these scriptures. It is incoherent! There is no need to twist or distort scriptures to maintain this Calvinist position--it is better to keep in line with what scripture teaches and accept the fact that God wants all men to come to know Him.

But there is one issue left to deal with and that is the Calvinist issue of election or predestination. The Calvinists claim here that God sovereignly chooses, selects or elects those He desires to be saved and live eternally with Him and the others He condemns to live eternally separated from Him. This is obviously a crucial issue to look into, for the implications of such a "double-predestination" doctrine are quite intense. If we accepted such a doctrine at face value, then we would have to question the character of God, is He a selective and an elitest God? Will Christ not receive some who desire to receive Him? What about our motives for evangelism. . . If God has decided who is His, than obviously He will personally see to it that they hear His Gospel, so why should we bother? And there are many other questions like these, that can be raised. So, for our purposes we need to investigate the Biblical usages of "elect" and "predestination" and determine what they mean.