

**SALVATION:
CHOICE OR
CHOSEN?**

A PURSUIT OF BIBLICISM

DR. RON TOBIN

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Dr. Ronald Tobin

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Tomah Baptist Church
1701 Hollister Avenue
Tomah, WI 54660
608-372-2071

Email: info@tomahbaptistchurch.com
Website: TomahBaptistChurch.com

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Most of all, I am appreciative of my dear wife, who from my youth has tirelessly served at my side as my companion. We began our journey of salvation on the same night and had been led by Him across the world, as well as our great Nation.

A Word from the Author

To some people, the title of this work evokes a response of: “Yes, I feel strongly about both points.” To most, however, the very idea of either view evokes a passionate response. Whichever viewpoint one holds, their historical positions can be traced back to the second century of Christianity. Most persons on either side are sincere Christians.

The question of the book title came into prominence during the Reformation. The two most noted theologians were John Calvin, who like his fifth-century mentor Augustine sided with “chosen”; and his antagonist Arminius sided with the choice. The truth is they much more agreed than disagreed. The chasm erupted at and after the Council of Dort (1618-1619) when Arminius and his views were condemned to be heretical. Subsequently, those that followed Arminius were hunted down and imprisoned or worse executed.

Arminius’ extreme was not simply that a man could freely choose his own destiny and salvation but potentially lose his salvation by choices also. Holiness or righteousness was viewed as somewhat a co-operative effort. To the Calvinist, any such choice for the maintenance of salvation was an enemy of free and sovereign grace. A saving grace only bestowed upon a preselected few down from the ages. Only they hear the call. Only they are regenerated so they will respond with belief. For centuries, Arminius and others argued for a position that man’s depravity did not eliminate responsibility, the potentiality of opportunity, or necessity of choice. Both men and followers had errors and

extremes of theology; at least as far as their works are concerned. This work is not intended to duplicate the vast volumes written on this subject but rather capsulate.

This work hopes to find a cord of balance. Moreover, while this work attempts to capsulate the arguments or discussion, it is in no way remiss in any part of the subject; rather it focuses on the core issues. This direction should allow any serious student to arrive at a Biblicist position.

The greatest polemical argument that militates against both extremes has always been true REVIVAL. Should Christ tarry His return, may we experience both personal and corporate revival. Maranatha!

Chapter 1: Introduction

Those considered four or five-point Calvinists are not always harsh, unloving or non-evangelistic witnesses. It also cannot be said those who oppose the Calvinist system are Arminians or so-called “Calminiast” or less intellectual. There is enough arrogance, pride, and misrepresentation on all sides.

Most of those individuals have gone toward Calvinism because of the influence of trending blogs, or because it is the newest fad for younger adults, its appeal of supposed intellectualism, and even a hands-off attitude toward *separation* in more modern Calvinists. For this reason, this work is written to help two groups of believers.

The first group is the sincere students in our churches that are separation-minded soul-winners, and Dispensationalists in pursuit of the Lost. It is secondly for the younger pastors or seminary students perhaps wavering but still looking for answers. I hope to encourage both groups of individuals to proclaim a new mantle or title—*Biblicists* (See Ch. 2 on Terms).

It is past time that we shake off the archaic labels of Arminians, Calvinists or "Calminians." This choice must be made the same as our forefathers—the Baptists and Fundamentalists had to do. The position put forth in this work is in the strictest sense—both balanced in logic and theology, as well as Scripture. It is my desire some of our strict Calvinist brethren might ponder some of the truths put forth in this book.

REVIVALS

The great revivals of the 1700's, 1800's, and the early 1900's were often led by those considered Calvinists, Non-Calvinists and Arminians. Out of those revival periods, there developed a fusion of thought which led to a revival of Dispensationalism and the Pre-Millennial views. At the same time, old-line denominations with their reformed and covenant theology fell prey to Modernism and Liberalism (the rejection of core Christian doctrines). The Separatist remnants were called "Fundamentalist" by their detractors for defending the fundamentals of the faith (core doctrines). They came from a variety of theological persuasions. They were focused and unified in their defense of historic biblical Christianity.

THE NEED

Today in our splintering biblical lives one of the movements affecting Christianity and revival is a resurgence of modern Calvinism. It is marked by its leaders and proponents especially online. Their views range from sincerity to arrogant, intolerant intellectual elitism. What needs to be answered is three-fold:

- 1.) Does it matter?
- 2.) What is the truth?
- 3.) What are the consequences?

This work should systematically answer those questions from a pastoral perspective.

Another need or perspective is to find if there is a balance which neither tips toward Calvinism or Arminianism. For instance, can the aided will choose or reject God's salvation without the choice being a "self-

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

work” or righteousness? Does man’s depravity render him helplessly incapable of choosing Christ even when hearing God’s Word and under the general conviction of the Holy Spirit, (if, in fact, the Holy Spirit even bothers)? Does man need an unrevealed X-factor of a selective or exclusive call? Does that mean that all others without that internal flame or mark or other identifiers are hopelessly damned? Is it factual and biblical that he who is foreordained to Salvation must first be regenerated (spiritually renewed) so that he can be enabled to make the choice that otherwise would be against his will? Could that also occur years before he chooses or never chooses? Does that even make sense or is it just philosophical sophistry or theological gymnastics?

Moreover, what is the great difference between the Calvinist and Arminians notion of “Perseverance of the Saints”? They seem to both arrive at the same fence posts of proving Salvation by righteous works. Why not accept “Eternal Security” (a more modern term) because of redemptions legal full estate and the continuation of regeneration? Why is this not the security and biblical decree in the predestination of those who have been saved?

Ephesians 1:4-10 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption

through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.

Finally, questions ultimately must begin with our Sovereign God. Are either Calvinists or Arminians totally correct in their statements about God? Does either view go off the beam a little? Is the Calvinist explanation consistent with God's revealed nature or plan? Is the Calvinist explanation of God's exclusionary love biblical and consistent? What about the Calvinist claim about who's whosoever?

There are serious questions with which the average sincere pastor or Christian is left. There are glaring logical but unscriptural promises or statements by the Calvinist system. Perhaps this is due to originating in the Reformed or Covenant system. That may also be why the modern alliance of Calvinism with Dispensationalist tends to border mere tolerance or theological schizophrenia.

Whatever the problems are in all systems, we want to arrive at a truly biblical and balanced truth.

Chapter 2: Knowing the Players

(A Brief History of Persons & Terms)

This chapter will briefly introduce the important events or persons; as well as important doctrinal terms. A general definition will be considered unless there is a difference of views.

Historical Persons

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine was born Aurelius Augustinus on November 13, 354 A.D. in what would be modern Algeria. His father was a pagan Roman officer and his mother, Monica, a godly Christian. He was well educated in classical Greek philosophy and law. As a young adult, he lived a riotous life. Later because of his mother's prayers and testimony, he converted to Christianity. He would move to Hippo, Africa and become a bishop. He is often credited with being one of the main founders of early Catholic doctrine.

Augustine's theology, though sometimes in conflict with later Roman Catholic doctrine, became the foundation for much of John Calvin's views. Later Augustine would become the defender of the faith for Rome against the Pelagian heresies and persecutor of Donatist (early Baptists) for their views insubordinate to the Roman Bishop. He was also used as a missionary educator to Britain briefly after Rome's fall in 410 A.D. He would produce his work *The City of God*.

John Calvin

Calvin (1509-1564) was one of the main leaders of the Reformation movement and perhaps most influential. He was a contemporary of Luther, Zwingli, Bullinger, Beza, and Melancthon. Most of them were Swiss. Calvin was born July 10, 1509, in Noyon, France. Martin Luther was already twenty-five years old at the time of Calvin's birth (Vance, 7). While Calvin was an exceptional scholar, little is known about his conversion, except that he was heavily influenced by the times. He was educated at the Church of Rome and School of Law.

Calvin was both an enigma and contradiction. He proclaimed Free Grace and murdered his opponents. In 1536, he assumed a pastorate in Geneva until 1538, when the town council of Geneva banished him for a season. Calvin later returned and used the State to enforce church (Christian) lifestyles upon the citizens, thus fusing a Protestant State Church. The rules were harsh at best, which is why he was referred to as "The Geneva Dictator" (Ibid, 84).

While Calvin wrote much, he is best known for his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It was that bulwark of God, the Trinity, and Salvation which so influenced people through the Ages. In fact, many of his followers took his view further than where he, such as the acrostic T.U.L.I.P. (though I think he would subscribe to it) (Ibid, 79).

James Arminius

Arminius was born October 10, 1560, at Oudewater, Holland, and died at age forty-nine in 1609. He was four years old when Calvin died in 1564, and

thus, never debated Calvin. He was initially enrolled at the University of Marburg in Marburg Germany, the First Protestant University until the Spanish army invaded the city. He would later, in 1576, attend the University of Leiden, a Protestant school where he would distinguish himself (Vance, 123). Arminius had his theological training at the school Calvin founded. He even recommended reading Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Overall, Arminius' theology was conservative. He considered all sixty-six books of the Bible infallible. He was more of a humanist of the times since he was a staunch anti-Catholic—similar to Calvin. He believed mankind to be “hopelessly lost,” and by himself incapable of doing good in his will or self; thus, he needed salvation by Christ alone. He believed in justification by faith like Luther or Calvin. He further believed in a security of believers, and rejected believers could fall away from faith or salvation. Like other reformers, he sprinkled infants and rejected the Anabaptist. Unlike Calvin, he was tolerant of those with whom he disagreed. (Ibid., 127-132).

Arminius rejected the supralapsarian Calvinist view of Predestination and wrote a treatise with twenty points refuting them. To him, Predestination was not the foundation of Salvation. He found the view to be repugnant to the Gospel and nature of God. To Arminius, the Calvinistic ideas of both supralapsarianism and sublapsarianism made God's Providence the Author of Sin. To him, the Believer is predestined to Eternal Life when one repents and believes. Furthermore, he believed that one's will had sufficient ability to do good if assisted by divine grace to perform it and required regeneration.

That idea greatly differed from Pelagius' view (Salvation by man's effort) or Thomas Aquinas' views of human perfection through the mind. Arminius rejected the idea of Irresistible Grace because of Scriptural proof and that it was not a philosophical system.

Arminius, however, while interpreting some Scriptural passages, believed it was possible for a believer to quit believing, and thus fall away. So according to that idea, assurance of salvation was only reached by subjective means, if the Believer kept responding to Grace and the Holy Spirit. That was where he found himself in a dilemma. Salvation still depends upon, in some way, the Believer's will, and not a legally binding contract. That view in some ways contradicted his view of Predestination and Adoption. He was, however, reformed in his thinking, and in no way Pelagian (Studebaker, 13-14).

The Synod or Council of Dort

The Synod of Dort was a national council that took place from 1618-1619, in the town of Dordrecht, in the Netherlands. It was held by the Dutch Reformed Church initially to discuss the Arminians' views. Those who objected to Calvin's and Beza's views published their objection in 1610 in a paper called *The Remonstrants*. During that meeting, they debated thirteen of those Remonstrants at Dort in 1618. From that meeting, the five points of Calvinism were put forth (referred to as the T.U.L.I.P.).

Another sad note in history was the false accusations against the followers of James Arminius. Many were hunted down and imprisoned, while some were even killed (Vance, 149-150).