

Sermon Title: Calvinism and Arminianism
Scripture Text: Various

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 7-31-11

What I'm going to share with you this morning, I've discussed hundreds of times in my life, in different situations and different classes and with different individuals. What I finally put together was this material that I'm going to give to you this morning, as a supplement to the Doctrine of Salvation class that I taught in Russia back in January.

The Russian evangelical church comes from a background that is highly "Arminian." If you don't know what that means, *fine*—you can get to Heaven without being able to define Arminianism. It's not *Armenian*; Armenia is a place you can come from. You can *be* "Armenian," but you can *believe* "Arminianism." Our tradition comes from a "Calvinistic" perspective. If you don't know what "Calvinism" is, same to you—you can get to Heaven without being able to define "Calvinism."

But *many* hours have been wasted debating the theological systems of "Calvinism" and "Arminianism." *Many* trees have been sacrificed to produce the paper upon which the arguments are written. Many believers have tragically forfeited what might have been blessed fellowship with fellow believers because they decided they cannot serve Christ alongside someone who is, in their opinion, on "the wrong side" of this debate.

Well, there's something wrong here. God's Word is clear, and it gives us "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet, 1:3; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). If we are diligent to search His Word, to interpret it properly, and to humble ourselves under its authority, we can be *thoroughly* confident of what it teaches (2 Tim. 3:16-17); and we *do not* need to be swept aside into debates over man-made systems of thought. I am convinced that God will *never* ask me if I am a Calvinist or an Arminian. I am convinced there are not two separate compartments in Heaven for Calvinists and Arminians. Now, some on either side would say, "Yeah, that's true, because the other side *won't be there* because of the false gospel they have believed!"

But today, I aim to help fellow Christians remain faithful to the Word of God, *without* getting swept aside into fruitless arguments and endless discussions about these overworked and emotionally-charged words. Instead, we should confine our discussions to God's intended meaning of each passage of His Word, in context. May God give you wisdom to understand, and grace to speak His "truth in love" (Eph. 4:15; cf. Prov. 3:3).

Good people who "love" the "Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 6:24), who trust in Him *and Him alone* for salvation (see Eph. 2:8-9; cf. Rom. 6:23; Phil. 3:9), who serve Him diligently—*on both sides of this issue*—have been debating these two competing theological systems since the year 1610; that's when this started. The *truths* at stake are crucial, but *most* of the debate is futile, and I'm afraid it is *often* carnal. So, to "Calvinism and Arminianism," my answer is: "No thank you!"

I'm going to organize this rather simply. "Don't call me a Calvinist!"—or, Why I Don't Want To Be Called A Calvinist. "Don't call me an Arminian!"—or, Why I Don't Want To Be Called An Arminian. Then, I want to show you, side-by-side in God's Word: God's Sovereignty and Man's Choice. And you'll see where we go with this.

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First of all: Why I Don't Want To Be Called A Calvinist. Now, since I am affiliated with ministries more Calvinistic than Arminian, I think I'm able to be more critical of those on "my side," if you will, of this debate. If, indeed, when you show up at Heaven, you have to declare—like "Friend of the Bride" or "Friend of the Groom"—if you have to declare: "I'm a Calvinist," or, "I'm an Arminian," I will have to be sitting on the Calvinistic side; there's no doubt about that.

But *I don't want that to be my label!* Why? Several reasons. First of all: Most people don't *really* know what Calvinism is. Ask 95 percent of the people who call themselves "Calvinists," and they can't tell you *anything* significant about the biography of John Calvin. Where did the name come from? Where did the system come from? A pastor from an Arminian background—he was actually a Russian pastor who had survived Communism, which is no small feat—on my very first Sunday in Russia, after church he pulled me aside and he said to me, "Calvinism is very bad! It means that you believe you can receive Christ, and then you can live any way you want to!"

I know *not one Calvinist on this planet* that believes that! That's *not true!* That's a caricature. But that gives you an idea how someone steeped in one tradition doesn't even know what it means, and doesn't know what the words mean, and winds up caricaturizing the other viewpoint.

Another reason I don't want to be called a Calvinist is that "Calvinism"—that word—*misrepresents* some of the beliefs of John Calvin. Some people might fall off their feet in a dead faint if they found out that Calvin *never, ever* came up with "Five Points of Calvinism"! And, by the way: you can get into Heaven without knowing the Five Points of Calvinism. Those who have *labeled* the famous "Five Points" as "Calvinism" state things much more strongly than Calvin did, and they did it after he died. That should tell you something: it's not from Calvin!

A third reason I don't want to be called a Calvinist—and like I said, I can be a little harder on this side, because these are my friends—the arrogance of many Calvinists is disgusting (see 2 Tim. 2:24-25; cf. Ecc. 10:12; Eph. 4:29). Is that strong enough? I put two pretty pejorative words in there: "arrogance" and "disgusting." There are some who go so far as to *question the possibility of anyone being saved* who doesn't believe in the "Five Points of Calvinism." And some say that believing in anything else is tantamount to heresy—or at least *dabbling* in heresy. And some present Calvinism with *no* patience, *no* compassion, or *no* grace toward those who disagree with them. And I'll have no part of that.

Another reason I don't want to be called a Calvinist is that to judge me on five points of doctrine is to rob me of at least 95 more things that are equally important. The great doctrines of Christianity are rich. You can never fully grasp the depth of all of them in your lifetime (Jb. 26:14). How *silly* are those who believe that five points summarize *everything* God says to us! Calling the Fab Five Points of Calvinism "The Doctrines of Grace"—I find that arrogant. Because what is that saying? It's saying: "If you don't believe *these five things*, you're not believing in grace!" Well, that's not true!

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Another reason that I don't want to be called a Calvinist is that many Calvinists use "Calvinism" as a hermeneutic. "Hermeneutics" are the principles of interpretation. And using "Calvinism" as a hermeneutic means that some people decide what every passage *has to mean*, or they know what it *can't possibly mean*, before they *study* it, because they've *predetermined* that it *will reinforce* what they believe! So some people come to their Bible and they lay over it, if you will, a *filter* of their theological system, and they read the passage through the filter—and that's *absolutely backward*! You develop your theological system by learning what each passage means *in its context*, and you put them all together. To decide what a passage *has to mean*, because of a conclusion you have *already drawn*, is backward.

Another reason that I don't want to be called a Calvinist: First John 2:2 means what it says! And by the way: have you noticed, I didn't give you the Five Points of Calvinism, and I'm not going to give you the Five Points of Remonstrance—which is the five-point-summary of Arminianism—because you don't need to know them. You need to know the Scriptures (see Is. 8:20; Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

First John 2:2 means what it says. Most Calvinists explain this verse as if it teaches something different than what it means. They believe that God, in eternity past, predetermined that He would send His Son, Christ Jesus, to die for the sins of a certain small percentage of people called "the elect," and that He would die for *their* sins and *their sins only*, and He never intended to, and never *did*, die for anybody else's sins. First John 2:2 is a problem for that! It says: "He Himself"—referring to Christ—"is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." I have had some Calvinists explain to me how, what that really means is that "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but *actually* really for ours only, and *not really* also for those of the whole world." They have to go into places and say, "Those words don't mean what they say"—*in that particular context*. Well, I'll take it for what it says, thank you. (see 1 Tim. 2:3-6; Heb. 2:9)

Another reason I don't care to be labelled a Calvinist is that First Timothy 4:10 means what it says: "We have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." Calvinistic explanation of that: "He is the Savior of all men *not really*, but *only* of believers." Well, it doesn't say that! It says "all men." The word "all" means "all"; "men" means "men." "He is the Savior of all men." Now is He the Savior *in a special way* of *believers*? Yes! If I preach Christ to someone, and I say, "Christ died for your sins"—if I'm speaking the truth, He *is* their Savior; there *is no Savior*, other than Jesus Christ (see Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5-6), but you don't get in on the benefits of what He did unless you "believe" (Jn. 3:18, 36; 8:24). That fits that verse absolutely perfectly—and usually makes Calvinists angry.

Another reason I don't want to be called a Calvinist is because of a favorite Bible verse: John 3:16—a favorite of many people. It means what it says: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Most Calvinists believe that God *did not* send His Son so that "the world might be saved" (Jn. 3:17). Most Calvinists believe that God does *not* love

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everyone in the world in the same sense, even though the words mean exactly the opposite (cf. Ezek. 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; Titus 3:4); they explain to you how *in this case*, "world" *doesn't* mean "world"—it means, well...all *segments* of "the world" have certain people who will believe, who are "the elect."

So another reason I don't want to be called a Calvinist is, when you get to the bottom line of Calvinism, many Calvinist snuff out man's will under God's sovereignty. God *is* sovereign—there is no doubt about that; there is no debate about that (see Ps. 103:19; 119:91; 135:6; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11). If you don't believe that God is sovereign, you don't believe in the God of the universe! That *is* who He is! His will *is* going to be accomplished on Earth—*all of it!* (Is. 46:10) His will *is* going to be accomplished on Earth (Ps. 33:11), but *you do have* the opportunity and the responsibility to make decisions which determine your eternal destiny (Jn. 5:40; 8:24). We *cannot deny* man's responsibility! We can stand up with Peter, preach Christ, and say, "Repent and believe, and you will be saved!" That's *your* choice, *your* responsibility—you have to make the decision! Would anybody like to come up here and give a testimony about how you came to Christ *against your will?* None of you did! You came to a point, and you chose.

Here's another one: The Bible does not teach "Double Predestination." Now, not all Calvinists teach Double Predestination, but those who like to be capital-C, *bold-print* Calvinists *do* preach Double Predestination. What does that mean? Well, first: the Bible *teaches*: "Predestination"—what does *that* mean? "Setting a destination in advance; predetermining where something is going to go." "Election"—that means "choosing out certain ones from among a group." The Bible teaches that, "before the foundation of the world," God "chose" people to be saved (Eph. 1:4; cf. 11)—that's *crystal-clear* in the Bible (cf. Acts 13:48; Jn. 6:37; Rom. 9:23; Gal. 1:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). But the Bible *does not* teach that God chose specific individuals and created them for the purpose of damning them (Ps. 9:16; Prov. 11:5; 14:32; Ecc. 7:29; Is. 3:11; Rom. 2:5). In other words: it teaches "predestination"—it does *not* teach predestination to the "lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10, 13-14; cf. Matt. 25:41). Argue that one with a Calvinist and he'll say, "Well, it's *logical*—there are ten pairs of socks in your drawer; and when you go and choose out one, you have *rejected* the other nine!" That's a pretty bad analogy; I won't dignify that, except to say: that's what they say.

Here's another one—and just about everybody who *really* likes to be called a Calvinist will probably write me off for this one: The Bible does not teach "Limited Atonement." Limited Atonement is the teaching of Calvinism that says what I told you before: God chose, in eternity past, to determine that His Son would come and die for the sins of the elect, *and only of the elect*; so, if a person is not elect, you cannot say: "Christ died for your sins"—you shouldn't say that. *In the end*, only those who believe in Jesus Christ will receive the benefits of His atonement (Jn. 1:12; 8:24; Acts 10:43; Rom. 1:16; 2 Thess. 2:12; 1 Pet. 2:7). So in the end, when you get to Heaven, will the Atonement be "limited" in its *application?* Yes! Does the Bible teach that it was limited in its *intent?* I think it's pretty clear—*it doesn't*. Nowhere in the Bible does it teach God sent His Son to die for the sins of the elect, and *only* for the sins of the elect; but several passages teach that He died for all—we saw First John 2:2 and First Timothy 4:10 (see also 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9).

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Another reason I don't want to be called a Calvinist is: Man *does* choose to believe or reject Christ. Many, *many* passages call people to make the choice to believe in Christ (Mk. 1:15; Jn. 9:35-38; 12:36; Acts 16:31; 28:24; Gal. 2:16; 1 Jn. 3:23), and many passages warn against rejecting Him (Jn. 3:18, 36; 12:48; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2:12; Heb. 2:3; 4:1-3; 1 Jn. 5:10). These are *legitimate invitations* to make *legitimate choices* which have eternal consequences! Everyone who spends eternity in the lake of fire will be there because he or she *chose* not to accept the grace of God (Jn. 5:40; Acts 28:24). That is man's responsibility.

A final reason why I don't want to be called a Calvinist is that I think John Calvin would be *appalled* by people using his name the way it is used (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12-13; 3:4-7). John Calvin devoted his life to preaching through God's Word verse-by-verse and book-by-book, and he did it nearly *daily* for a *long* time. His main work on theology, which is called "Institutes of the Christian Religion," *nowhere* teaches anything called "Calvinism," or resembling it. As a humble man of God, I think Calvin would *hate* to hear people use his name as the title for their doctrine. So, please: Don't call me a Calvinist.

Secondly: Don't call me an Arminian! Why I Don't Want To Be Called An Arminian. Number 1—Most people don't really know what Arminianism means. Most people know even less about Jacobus Arminius—who lived from 1560 to 1609, only 49 years—than they know about John Calvin.

Arminius was a Dutch theologian. When he rejected the Biblical doctrine of Election to Salvation, he touched off a pretty intense debate in the Dutch church. It's interesting—there was no fighting between "Calvinists" and "Arminians" while Calvin and Arminius were alive; they never arm-wrestled over theology. But after Arminius's death, his followers produced a paper called "The Five Articles of Remonstrance." It was basically the Five Points of Arminianism. It was answered in the year 1618 at the Synod of Dort with "The Five Points of Calvinism." Most people really don't know what Arminianism means, and could not list what their Five Points are. Another reason why I don't want to be called an Arminian is the same thing I said before: To judge me on five points of doctrine is to rob me of at least 95 more that are equally important.

Thirdly: Many Arminians use "Arminianism" as a hermeneutic. Some of my most frustrating conversations about Bible doctrine have been with Arminian brothers and sisters—mainly brothers—who try to explain that passages such as John 10:28 do not mean what they clearly say; we'll come to that one in a minute. They "interpret" such passages by imposing upon them what *they* believe other passages say; and they allow one text to *overrule* another one, instead of saying: "They're *both* true. How do they fit together?" (cf. Ps. 119:128, 160; Matt. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16)

Don't call me an Arminian because Ephesians 1:4-5 means what it says. It says: "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." That's pretty obvious.

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God's "will," "before the foundation of the world," was to choose certain people *to become adopted as His sons*. He chose you to that end—*you*, individually (Gal. 1:15-16). This passage teaches: God chose each individual believer (cf. Jn. 1:13; 6:37, 44-45, 65; 15:16; 17:2; Acts 13:48; Rom. 9:15-16; 1 Thess. 1:4; Jas. 2:5). And the words mean that God chose for Himself, by His own will. That does not negate man's responsibility to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Rom. 10:9). It *does* mean that God chose who would believe (Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:1). And by the way: Ephesians 1:4-5 is near the beginning of a sentence that is probably the most majestic sentence in all of the Bible; it's 138 words long in Greek, *packed* with doctrine! If you study that one sentence and learn what it means, you'll be theologically ahead of most people. To make *any* sense of it in English, it gets broken down into at least three sentences in every English translation.

Another reason I don't want to be called an Arminian: Second Thessalonians 2:13 means what it says. Like Ephesians 1:4-5, the passage teaches that "God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation." You have to harmonize this with other passages, but *no* passage *negates* the clear meaning of another (see Prov. 30:5; Matt. 4:4). This one says: "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." The subject of the sentence: "God"; the verb: "chose"; the direct object: "you"; and the purpose: "for salvation." That's just crystal-clear. To teach that we are *not* chosen to salvation, you have to stand up and say this passage and others contradict what you believe, or you contradict those passages—and that's a problem (see 1 Thess. 4:8; cf. Is. 45:19).

Another reason I don't want to be called an Arminian: First Peter 1:1-5 means what it says. This teaches that salvation is based upon God's "election," "foreknowledge," and "sanctifying work"; that it leads to "an inheritance" which is guaranteed because "the power of God" protects a believer. To teach that it is possible to *lose your salvation*—which is one of the Five Points of Arminianism—contradicts that passage, and many others (e.g., Ps. 37:24, 28; Jer. 32:40; Lk. 22:31-32; Jn. 5:24; 6:39; 10:27-29; Rom. 8:28-39; 1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6; Heb. 7:25; Jude 24).

Another reason I do not want to be called an Arminian is that John 10:28 means what it says. If a person who is saved can ever be lost, Jesus was not telling the truth, because Jesus said: "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." Can you get any more clear than that? [NOTE: In response to the Arminian assertion that people who are truly saved can—or ever would—*take themselves* "out of" His "hand," consider Jeremiah 32:40; Heb. 3:14; Jude 24; Rev. 14:12]

Friends, what is "eternal life" if it's not "eternal"? (see Jn. 5:24; cf. Heb. 10:14) What is *temporary* eternal life? It's an oxymoron! And I'm not calling people "morons" who believe Arminianism—I'm saying it's not true. This passage needs to be harmonized with other passages, *without allowing one passage to negate another*. And what does "never perish" mean, if it doesn't mean "*never* perish"? Let's be honest with what God's Word says. (cf. Jn. 8:31; 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Jn. 2:19)

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Another reason I don't want to be called an Arminian—the flipside of what I said about Calvinism: Many Arminians snuff out the sovereignty of God under man's will. Now, we do not deny—we *cannot deny*—God is sovereign; "His will" is going to be accomplished in "all things" (Eph. 1:11; cf. Ps. 33:11; 135:6; Is. 46:10). But the Arminian explanation of the passages that teach Election says: "God looked into the future, saw who would believe, and thereby chose them"—which makes God *not sovereign!* That makes *man* sovereign. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are both taught in the Bible. Neither one annuls the other. In the end, God's will *will* be done (Jn. 6:37), the Elect *will* be saved (Jn. 6:39; 17:2; Rom. 8:30), and each individual *will* decide (Jn. 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24, 40; 2 Thess. 2:12). (cf. Jer. 24:7; Jn. 3:3, 5; Acts 13:48; 16:14; 1 Cor. 12:3b)

Another reason I don't want to be called an Arminian, and I don't want to be associated with that camp: Arminianism leads to "Open Theism." You probably don't know what "Open Theism" is unless you've had occasion to be forced to study it. But, once you subordinate the sovereignty of God to the will of man, God is stripped of many of His essential attributes. The modern heresy of "Open Theism," mainly taught by a guy named Gregory Boyd, is basically saying that God is learning as He goes (contra Ps. 139:4, 16; 147:5; Is. 40:28; 42:9; Jn. 13:19; Rev. 17:8). I mean, He's really smart, but He doesn't really know "the end from the beginning" (Is. 46:10), like Isaiah says that He does. And "Open Theism" is the fruit that comes from the seed of unbridled Arminianism. Remove God's sovereignty, and theology begins to unravel. (Ps. 50:21; Is. 29:15)

Another reason I don't want to be called an Arminian: Arminianism agrees with "Pelagianism" or "Semi-Pelagianism." I can see the glaze that has formed over a lot of your eyes; I've thrown a lot of words out there—*on purpose!* I don't have to explain them all; we have until Jesus comes for us to understand all of them. But this system called "Pelagianism" teaches that mankind was not directly affected by the sin of Adam (contra Rom. 5:12; cf. Gen. 8:21; Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Ecc. 7:29); and that we are guilty only of our own individual sins, but we are not included in the guilt of Adam's sin (contra Rom. 5:12). A man named Pelagius taught that.

There are some that have a modified version of that, so we call them "Semi-Pelagians." They were all condemned at one of the church councils in the Fifth Century. First Corinthians 15:22 is pretty clear: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (see Col. 2:13; cf. Jn. 3:36; 14:6; 1 Jn. 5:11-12). Adam was not just a bad example; he wasn't just a mean older brother; he was the head of the human race, and "in Adam all died" (cf. Gen. 2:17; Eph. 2:1).

Another reason I don't want to be called an Arminian: Arminianism denies Total Depravity. "Total Depravity" is the theological shorthand for the belief that sin affects every part of mankind (Gen. 6:5; 1 Kings 8:46; Jb. 15:14; 25:4; Ps. 143:2; Ecc. 7:20; Jer. 13:23; 17:9; Matt. 7:11; Mk. 7:21-22; Jas. 3:2); that, in relation to God, there is no good in the sinner (Rom. 3:10-18, 23; 8:7-8); and that there is nothing within the sinner which can turn him to God—it has to be by God's "grace" (Eph. 2:8-9), it has to be the work of His Spirit (Jn. 3:5; 6:44, 63, 65; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 2:14; 12:3b; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; Titus 3:5; cf. Ezek. 36:25-27).

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Arminianism holds that man, indeed, can turn to God by his own will—but Romans 3:10-11 says: "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, *there is none who seeks for God.*" You did not seek God *until God drew you*—you don't have it in you (Jn. 6:44; 15:16; 1 Cor. 2:14; 1 Jn. 4:19).

Another reason I don't want to be called an Arminian: The Bible teaches that God chooses who will be saved. The Bible says that! Many passages, in addition to those that I've given to you today, teach that God chooses who will be saved (e.g. Jn. 6:37, 45; 17:2; Rom. 9:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:13), and Arminians deny that those passages mean what they clearly say.

The final reason I don't want to be called an Arminian: I don't want to insult a Brother. Jacobus Arminius would be appalled by people using his name as a badge of theological correctness (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12-13; 3:4-7). He never sought to attach his name to a set of doctrines, any more than did John Calvin; it was after he died that the "Articles of Remonstrance" were written. As a child of God who sought to understand His Word, I think he would hate to see his name attached to theological debates.

Now, I happen to think that Arminius was wrong on a few things, but I also would not at all be surprised to see him in Heaven. It was the *followers* of Arminius, after his death, who attached his name to these beliefs.

Now, in light of the emotionally-charged arguments, which make discussing Arminianism versus Calvinism almost always unfruitful, I suggest we *just don't use* those words. Be a Conscientious Objector! If someone says, "Are you a fill-in-the-blank-ist?" the best answer is: "Explain to me what you mean by that." A lot of times, that makes the conversation *way shorter*, because *they* don't know what they mean, they just want to know: Are you on the *right* side of the street, or on the *wrong* side of the street? (see Ps. 15:4b; 16:3; 119:63; Rom. 12:16; Eph. 1:15; 4:3; Col. 1:4; Heb. 13:24)

I suggest we refer to one another by terms that are actually used in the Bible. Please accept my exhortation to discuss openly what any and every passage of the Bible means. We're going to do it for the next several weeks; I'm going to address all kinds of questions; some of them will even touch on Calvinism and Arminianism, some will touch on Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism—and you didn't even *know* that when you wrote the question! But let's stay away from beating one another into submission under the weight of man-made theological arguments (cf. Titus 3:9).

There was a man who visited Heritage Bible Church several times. One night, we happened to sit together over dinner before the Wednesday night service, and he said something very strong; it happened to be about one of the Five Points of Calvinism. And I brought up to him one of the Scriptures that I have pointed out to you here, and I said, "Well, that can't be true if *this* is true. So, I'm going to choose the Scriptures over that statement that you just made. We need to make sure we don't overstate things." Never saw him again! I hope I *do*; I sure hope I *ultimately* see them in Heaven.

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So if you're *not* going to call me a "Calvinist," if you're not going to call me an "Arminian," there are a lot of things you *can* call me. "Not late for dinner" should be on the list, but it's not. You can call me a "Christian" (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). Did you know that it was the Non-Christians who first coined the term "Christian"—"the ones who look like Christ"? That's a pretty good name.

You can call me a "disciple" (Matt. 10:24-25; Lk. 14:26-27; Jn. 8:31; 13:35; 15:8; Acts 6:1-2, 7; 11:26; 14:21). In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said "Go...and make disciples."

You can call me a "believer," as in John 3:16—believing in Christ; or, Galatians 3:9 uses that term as well (cf. Acts 5:14; 2 Cor. 6:15; 1 Thess. 1:7; 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:21).

You can call me a "saint." Now, some people—especially if they come from a Roman Catholic background—they would think that's premature. They would also think that it's highly *unlikely* that I would ever achieve "sainthood." But "saint" means "holy one"—in Christ, you're seen in His holiness (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9); you're a "saint" (1 Cor. 1:2; cf. Ps. 16:3; Dan. 7:18; Matt. 27:52; Acts 9:13, 32; Rom. 1:7; Eph. 1:18; 2:19; Jude 3; Rev. 14:12; 19:8). We are *all* "saints" by faith in Jesus Christ.

You can call me your "brother" (Acts 9:17). The Russians are *really good* on this one; this is their favorite one—"Brothers and Sisters"—and they actually call the leadership meeting of the church "The Brothers' Meeting." When we are in the context of Heritage Bible Church, it's okay with me if you call me "Pastor" (Eph. 4:11)—that defines me by one of the functions that I serve. It will not offend me if you call me "Jim." That's just fine; God refers to me that way, most of the time.

Now, here's something else: I am not even remotely, not a little bit, *not for a moment* going to waste one of my precious remaining brain cells—or any of your precious time—finding *middle ground* between Calvinism and Arminianism! I don't want to be a "Calviminian," or whatever you would be. I'm *not interested* in helping people to compromise or to pick and choose between the two, until they come up with a system that *they* personally like—and it would *guaranteed wrong*! And *please* don't name a system after *me*—it would be "*Harris-ee*"! If you don't know, my last name is "Harris"—you just got that joke; you can laugh later.

I *am* interested in carefully studying every portion of God's Word, interpreting it in context to find the intended meaning—which is what the *original* writer expected the *original* readers to understand it to mean in *their* language, in *their* time, and in *their* culture—and then, put all of that together. I *refuse* to defend *any* theological statement which requires me to explain to you why *any* verse of the Bible *does not mean* what it says! That's my governing motto in theological debates (see 2 Tim. 3:16; cf. Ps. 119:128, 160; Matt. 4:4; 1 Cor. 14:33). If I have to say that a verse does not mean what it says, I'm not going to go there. Now, to be sure, there are difficult passages in the Bible (2 Pet. 3:16)—I make no bones about that. But plain, declarative sentences in non-symbolic contexts—they mean what they say.

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Scripture Text: Various

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 7-31-11

My Calvinistic brothers and sisters in Christ are very fond of the Doctrine of the Sovereignty of God; and they mount up on that horse, and sometimes they ride it off into the sunset—leaving a lot of other things behind. My Arminian brothers and sisters in Christ are very fond of what the Bible teaches about human responsibility to choose; one of *their* favorite terms is: "Free Will." Now, I've got them there, because "free will" *is not in the Bible*. If you're a "slave of sin" (Jn. 8:34), explain to me how you're "free." And then, when you escape your slavery to sin, you're a "slave" to "Christ" (1 Cor. 7:22; cf. Rom. 1:1; 6:17-18; Gal. 1:10; Eph. 6:6). But, man *does* have freedom to "choose" (Deut. 30:19)—it's just not a hundred percent, *absolute* freedom.

The Calvinists cross a clear line when they overrule clear passages that teach man's choices and man's responsibility for his choices (Deut. 32:46-47; Jos. 24:15; 1 Kings 8:21; Prov. 1:29; Is. 7:15-16; Jn. 3:18-20; 5:40, 44).

The Arminians cross a line when they overrule clear statements about Election (Jn. 13:18; Rom. 11:7; 2 Tim. 2:10) and Predestination (Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:5, 11) and Foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:1-2; cf. Acts 2:23).

Both of them cross a line when they say that they know the mind of God or the decrees of God from before the foundation of the world *which are not stated in the Bible* (Deut. 29:29; Ps. 131:1; 1 Cor. 4:6).

Both of them cross a line when they are arrogant or self-righteous or argumentative or disrespectful in the name of defending what the Bible teaches (2 Tim. 2:24-25). You're not defending the Scriptures if you're doing it in an arrogant, hostile, defensive way; you're being a—I think the Greek word is *jerk*.

Both of them cross a line when they call into question the salvation of people on the other side of the debate, *just because* they're on the other side of the debate.

It's crystal-clear in the Bible: God is sovereign; He chooses who will be saved (2 Thess. 2:13). His will *will* be done (Ps. 33:11). He knows "the end from the beginning" (Is. 46:10). Nothing happens—even in the realm of sinful man—which can thwart God's eternal plan (Prov. 16:1, 9; 19:21; 21:30; Lam. 3:37; Dan. 4:35).

It is crystal-clear in the Bible that man is called to "choose life" or "death" (Deut. 30:19), sin or obedience (Prov. 28:13; 2 Thess. 2:12), Heaven or Hell (Matt. 25:46), right or wrong (Is. 1:16-17).

And the invitation to salvation stands open to *everyone* (Is. 45:22; 49:6; Matt. 11:28-29; Acts 17:30; Rev. 22:17), and *every* man and woman will stand before God to give an account for how he or she responds to the invitation to "the free gift" of "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). (Prov. 13:13; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 20:11-15).

So, *please*: Don't call me a Calvinist. Don't call me an Arminian. You can call me any of the things the Bible says. *Don't* call me late for dinner.

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But, let me finish by showing you something. The theme behind Arminianism is man's so-called "free will"—man's responsibility to choose. That's the horse that pulls the cart of Arminianism. The horse that pulls the cart of Calvinism is the sovereignty of God. *Both of those things* are clearly taught in the Bible, and I want to give you a sample of those things. (see Prov. 16:1, 9)

Talk about the Cross: Acts 2:23—"This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God"—you can't say it any more clearly than that! God predetermined that event, *on that day, at that time, in that place* (Gal. 4:4; cf. Dan. 9:25). He determined it in advance. And the verse goes on to say: "you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."

Was man responsible for putting Christ on that cross? *Yes.* (Jn. 19:11; cf. Matt. 26:59; Mk. 11:18; 14:1; Acts 7:52; 1 Cor. 2:8; 1 Thess. 2:15) Was God responsible for putting Christ on that cross? *Yes.* (Is. 53:6, 10) Do those contradict? *No.* Can I *explain* them? *No.* I can't explain how they fit together. (see Is. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33)

Determined by God, and chosen by man. John 10:18—Jesus says: "This commandment I received from My Father." What commandment? Well, look at the rest of what He said: "I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (vss. 17-18). Jesus gave His life. He gave His life by what He received from the Father in eternity past. Determined by God, chosen by the man, Jesus.

The Cross again: Acts 3:18—"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ"—His Messiah—"would suffer, He has thus fulfilled." God announced it beforehand, and then *He* fulfilled it. That's crystal-clear. Same context, same passage—back up a little bit: "Men of Israel...you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life" (vss. 12, 14-15). Who did it—the Jews who rejected Him? *Yes.* The Roman soldiers who nailed Him to the cross? *Yes.* And God the Father, who *predetermined* it and *fulfilled* it. *Both* of those are crystal-clear, side-by-side in the Bible.

Starting to get the point? I'm only getting warmed up. Luke 22:22—"For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined"—that is, determined by God. But see *the rest of the same sentence*: "but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" Judas, in the most *wicked* act of deception in the history of the human race, *did the will of God* (Is. 53:10)!

Side-by-side, my friends—they're in the Bible! Determined by God, and chosen by man.

Let's go to Acts Chapter 4:27-28—"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." God determined it, but how did it happen? "Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel" *did it!* God determined it—man did it. Man did it—but God determined it. Both side-by-side, crystal-clear, in the Bible.

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How about "stumbling" over Christ? First Peter 2:8—"They stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed." They're side-by-side *in the same sentence*. Why do people stumble? Because they are disobedient to the Word of God. When someone rejects Christ, that person *rejects Christ!* "To this doom they were appointed." It is determined by God that not all will believe (see Deut. 29:4).

John 6:37—"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me..." How many are going to be saved? Exactly as many as the Father draws to the Son through the Holy Spirit (see also Jn. 6:45, 63; Jn. 17:2; cf. Matt. 11:25-27). The verse continues: "...and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." There is not one person who will ever come to Christ, saying: "Please! I confess my sins! I repent! Save me!"—to whom He will say, "Eh, nope! Not on My list!" Man is responsible. God is sovereign.

Believing in Christ. 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." How many come to Christ, without being drawn by the work of God? *None*. (see also Jn. 6:65; 1 Cor. 2:14; 12:3b)

Matthew 11:28—Jesus, speaking in public; I can see Him opening His arms, I can hear that booming voice: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." A universal invitation that will be heeded only by those whom God draws (cf. Matt. 11:25-27). *Both* of those things are taught in the Bible.

Acts 13:48—"As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." How did they get there? Five verses later, it says that when Paul and Barnabas preached, they "spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed" (14:1). *Man* spoke in such a way that people believed, but how many believed? "As many as had been appointed to eternal life." (see Acts 16:14; cf. Jer. 24:7) They're side-by-side in Scripture, my friend. I read you Second Thessalonians 2:13—"God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation"—God chose! How?—"through sanctification by the Spirit"—that's the work of God—"and faith in the truth"—who believes? Man does. God's sovereignty, man's will.

Acts 27—this is the shipwreck of Paul; God reveals to Paul through an angel who says: "God has granted you all those who are sailing with you" (vs. 24). God says: "Everybody is going to be saved." But, He also tells Paul to tell them: "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved" (vs. 31). God's will accomplished, but man had to receive it—side-by-side in the Scriptures.

Then there's God's providence. Remember Joseph? His dear older brothers were going to kill him. The cooler heads prevailed, and they settled for the "kinder, gentler" way of selling him as a slave. He winds up in Egypt. God exalts him to be in charge. His brothers have to come and find out who he is, and ask for grain. Joseph describes it this way, in Genesis Chapter 45: "God sent me before you to preserve life" (vs. 5). "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth" (vs. 7). "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (vs. 8). But, he also said: "Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because *you* sold me here" (vs. 5).

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It's "both/and," friends, it's not "either/or"! It's "both/and"—side-by-side! In Genesis 50:20, Joseph said: "God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result"—but he also says: "you meant evil against me." *Even the evil acts of man* cannot thwart the sovereignty of God (cf. Jas. 1:20 with Ps. 76:10a; Is. 10:5-7).

This, my friends, is called: "antinomy." Those aren't little things that stick out of caterpillars. "Antinomy" is a contradiction between two beliefs or conclusions that, in themselves, are reasonable. The components of that word: "anti" is "against"; "nomos" is "law"—"antinomy" is when two things are both true, and you can't explain how they reconcile. One doesn't overrule the other; one is not subservient to the other—both are equally true, all the time.

So don't insult God. In Isaiah 55, He says: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways...For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (vss. 8-9). Don't insult God. (see Rom. 9:19-21)

Listen: "God...knows all things" (1 Jn. 3:20), including the future (Is. 46:10). God knew, from eternity past, that Jesus would die on the Cross. Thus, Jesus *must die on the Cross*—it's God's will (Matt. 26:54; cf. Lam. 3:37). If He hadn't, God would have been wrong in what He foreknew (1 Pet. 1:20), but an all-knowing God *cannot be wrong*, or He wouldn't be omniscient (Ps. 147:5). But, Jesus *freely chose* to die on the Cross. Therefore, *the same event* was both *predetermined* and *freely chosen* simultaneously.

God knows all things. Whatever God knows beforehand must come to pass; if He is sovereign, it *is* determined (Eph. 1:11). If it didn't come to pass, God would have been wrong in what He foreknew; but an all-knowing God *cannot* be wrong in what He foreknows. God knew Judas would betray Christ (Jn. 6:64); therefore, it *had* to come to pass; it *was* determined that Judas would betray Christ (Ps. 41:9). And that's flawless logic: If God has infallible knowledge of future free acts, then the future is completely determined according to His will (Prov. 16:1, 9; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1; Jer. 10:23). It *does not follow* that Judas was *not* free to betray or not to betray Christ. That's because there is no contradiction in claiming that God knew for sure—He predetermined Judas would *freely, with free choice*, betray Christ. At the Last Supper, Christ invited Judas not to do it. Remember that? He reached out to him right then. And what is contradictory to say—and what the Bible *never* says—is that Judas was *forced* to betray Christ. He chose—he wasn't forced (Matt. 26:14-16).

God knows all things. What He knows will come to pass. God knew you would believe in Christ, *and* He chose you—therefore, it has to come to pass that you would believe in Christ *by your own free choice* (Acts 16:14).

I close with this quote. It's from a book called "Chosen But Free." It had me at the title. If it had been a lousy book, I would have been so disappointed, but it's not. "God's predestination and human free choice are a mystery, but not a contradiction. They go beyond human reason, but not against human reason. That is: they are not incongruous,

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but neither can we see exactly how they are complementary. We apprehend each as true, but we do not comprehend how both are true. Saint Augustine summed it up well when he urged that we may not so defend grace as to seem to take away free will; or, on the other hand, so assert free will as to be judged ungrateful to the grace of God in our arrogant impiety. There is no contradiction in God knowingly predetermining and predeterminately knowing, from all eternity, precisely what we would do with our free acts; for God determined that moral creatures would do things freely; He did not determine that they would be forced to perform free acts. What is forced is not free, and what is free is not forced. In brief: we are chosen but free."

Now, you probably don't understand *all* those terms I used. If you do, would you explain them to me? I just put them in here because they sounded good...well, not really. But you see, the point is: in God's Word, we have "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). We don't need to have fights over man-made systems.

Now, God determined in eternity past that at this moment, I would—of my free will—say: Let's pray:

Our Father, thank You for the riches of Your grace in Christ Jesus. Thank You for calling us to Yourself. Do Your work in our hearts, we pray. Give us courage to choose to let You do Your work in our hearts. Give us courage to be bold to speak the truth in love. Give us courage to face temptation, and to resist. Give us courage to stand for You in a hostile world. Whatever You need to do in or lives, do it, we pray, so that we would be the more useful for Your glory, in Jesus' name. Amen.