

## **§ 11. Doctrine of Salvation**

### **Lecture 4**

#### **Arminianism Continued**

Welcome to Defenders. Can you believe that it's been five months now that we've been podcasting Defenders remotely from my home office? We never suspected when we started doing this that it would be so long. But we are so glad that we didn't interrupt the class but have continued to come to you remotely so that we did not have to interrupt our study together. I really enjoy preparing for the class, and I hope that these lessons have been helpful and encouraging to you as well.

We've been talking about the doctrine of salvation from contrasting Calvinistic and Arminian perspectives. Last time we looked at the Arminian understanding of Ephesians 1. We saw that the Arminian interprets election to be Christocentric – to concern everyone who is in Christ. And, secondly, to be corporate in nature. It is primarily this corporate group that is elect, and individuals are elect only secondarily insofar as they are members of that corporate group.

Today we want to turn to a second key passage which is Romans 8:28-30. Paul writes,

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What the Arminian emphasizes is that God's calling here by which he calls people to salvation is not an insincere call. This is a genuine call to which people can respond. God really wants them to respond and be saved.

So in 2 Peter 3:9 we read, "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." So God does not want anyone to perish. He wants all to reach repentance. Similarly, in 1 Timothy 2:4, Paul writes God our Savior "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

God genuinely wants all persons to be saved and does not want any to perish. So this call that goes out to people to salvation is a sincere call. Robert Shank, whom I introduced in last week's lesson, describes the Calvinist view by drawing a number of sharp contrasts between what the Scripture affirms and what Calvinism affirms. On page 165 he writes,

Thus the call, addressed by God to all, by design of God is *not* to all, but only to some. The ungodly have [to quote Calvin] "an asylum to which they may betake

themselves from the bondage of sin,” and they are utterly without excuse for not doing so – despite the fact that God by immutable decree has rendered them totally unable to do anything other than to “ungratefully reject the offer that is made to them.” When God asks “Why will you die?” the real answer is that God has so ordained. “God so loved the world” that He determined that few shall believe and be saved. “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth,” cries God to a lost world . . . while making certain that most men do not comply. “Whosoever will, let him come,” pleads the Risen Christ . . . while the Father makes certain that most men will not come. “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved” . . . but He has effected a “hidden” arrangement ensuring that most of the world *shall not* be saved.

Obviously, Shank is writing here with considerable sarcasm about the Calvinist view, saying that, in effect, the call to repentance and salvation on the Calvinist view is a sham. It is an insincere call because even though God issues this universal call, He himself wills that not all respond to it and does not give his saving grace to people to enable them to respond to it.

With regard to Romans 8:28-30, Shank distinguishes between election and predestination. Election is the corporate calling, the calling out of a people or a body (the church). Election is a corporate notion. Predestination, by contrast, he sees as the foreordination of the elect to conformity to the image of Christ. So anyone who is a part of that elect body is predestined to be conformed to Christ’s image. That’s what Paul means when he says, “Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.”

To give my own illustration, suppose I were to announce, “We’re going to be leading a tour of Israel next year.” Anyone who wants to can sign up for the tour and join us on the trip. Those who go are guaranteed to see the Sea of Galilee, to walk the walls of Jerusalem, to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and so on, because that is what is planned. That would not guarantee who is actually in the group and goes on the tour.

Similarly, here God has predestined and ordained that a certain group of people, namely, the church, will be justified, sanctified, and glorified, but that doesn’t guarantee who is in the group. So predestination is not the same as election. Election is the corporate calling, and predestination is God’s ordaining that those who are members of that elect body will be conformed to the image of Christ, will be sanctified, justified, and eventually glorified.

Let’s turn now to how the Arminian understands faith. For the Arminian, faith is not something that is bestowed upon us by God independent of our own free decision to believe in Christ. The Arminian recognizes God’s sovereign choice to save sinners. In

Romans 9:18, Paul writes, “So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills.” It is God’s discretion whom he shall save and whom he shall pass over. It is up to God. In verses 22-24 Paul explains who it is, then, that God has chosen to have mercy upon. He writes,

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

So God, in his sovereignty, has chosen to elect for himself not simply Jewish people but Gentile peoples as well. No Jewish person can gainsay God’s decision in this matter because God is sovereign. He has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he has chosen to save Gentiles as well as Jews. So then, in verses 30-31, Paul says,

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but that Israel who pursued the righteousness which is based on law did not succeed in fulfilling that law.

It is through faith that one comes to be a part of that elect body. God has sovereignly chosen to save all who have faith in Christ Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile. This is his sovereign choice. Similarly, over in Galatians 3:6-9, Paul writes,

Thus Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

Faith is the key factor in determining whether one is a part of that elect body of persons that God has chosen. It is faith which qualifies you to be a son of Abraham and an heir to God’s promises.

Finally, back to Romans again: Romans 10:12-13:

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For, “every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

So faith is the distinguishing factor between who is elect and who is not elect. It doesn’t matter whether you are Jew or Gentile. All who have faith in Christ Jesus will be saved.

The Arminian, in contrast to the Calvinist, regards God’s grace, which is freely offered to all, as resistible. Look, for example, at Acts 7:51. This is Stephen’s statement just before

his stoning. In verse 51 of chapter 7 he says to the people around him, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.” So grace is not irresistible; it can be resisted. God’s saving grace is freely offered to all persons, and those who respond with faith will be part of that elect group of people, and so foreordained to share in its blessings. But this is not an irresistible, unilateral work of God. This is a work that requires a free human response.

That completes my exposition of an Arminian understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Next time we’ll turn to an evaluation of these two competing views. Until then, may God guide you throughout this coming week.<sup>1</sup>

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