

A Reformed Arminian View

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Reformed Arminianism is the systematic view of Scripture held by Jacobus Arminius, which was espoused prior to the *Remonstrance Articles* of his followers. Arminius considered himself to be Reformed, and many within the Dutch Reformed movement held his approach to theology. Today, however, the term *Calvinist* is virtually synonymous with Reformed, and anything with the term “Arminian” in it is considered an opposing point of view. Arminius’ view was neither Calvinistic nor Arminian. This article is intended to put to rest the typical straw man arguments and misrepresentations that plague the debate between these “estranged parties,” as Sproul refers to them.

Similarities between Arminius’ theology and Calvinism

Human depravity – human will in its fallenness cannot achieve *any* spiritual good unless assisted and enabled by divine grace. “The Free Will of man toward the True Good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost... For Christ said, ‘Without me, you can do *nothing*.’” Arminius always wished to maintain the greatest possible distance from Pelagianism. (139)

Justification – Christ’s atonement was not merely a passion play or exhibition to show God’s love or his displeasure toward sin. It was not intended to merely exert a moral influence on men or uphold the public justice by affirming the moral order. Rather, like Anselm, Arminius held to a penal satisfaction view of the atonement (i.e. a *forensic* view). God as judge will only justify a man by fully satisfying the law himself (*inherent righteousness*), or by God accounting to that man the full satisfaction of the law as fulfilled by another in his stead (*imputed righteousness*). Payment for his sin must similarly be made one way or the other, either by himself or by another in his stead. (141)

Arminius absolutely rejected any doctrine of works. “To be in a state of grace means to be found *in Christ*.” Jesus led a sinless life, died a substitutionary death, rose from the dead on the third day, and ascended to the Father where he abides forever to intercede for the saints. “These are objective, redemptive events of history... irrespective of my subjective response to them.” The phrase “in Christ” has to do with the believer’s union with Christ. Our sins were imputed to him so that his righteousness (both his active obedience in life, and his passive obedience in his substitutionary death) would be imputed to us. (142)

Differences between Arminius’ theology and Calvinism

The question now turns to this: How can one be found *in Christ*? What brings about this act of imputation? If it occurs by a particularistic understanding of God’s unalterable decree, then the Calvinists are correct in their view of unconditional election (Christ atoned for the elect only, as opposed to universal atonement), irresistible grace, and the necessary perseverance of the saints. This is based on the Redemptive Covenant within the Godhead to redeem God’s elect. As Steele

¹ Ashby, Stephen M., in *Four views on Eternal Security* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids 2002), Matthew Pinson, ed. (the page numbers are included in parentheses here)

and Thomas explain, in this covenant the Father elects a definite number of individuals for himself, the Son does what is necessary to save those the Father has given him, and the Spirit applies that salvation to the elect. However, there is no direct indication in Scripture that such a covenant was ever made, and more importantly, the terms of such a covenant are not revealed, especially whether or not they were conditional. It is only when we assume *a priori* that election is *un*-conditional, that we conclude the *ordo salutis* and all other elements of Calvinism. The issue then is whether there is any Scriptural foundation for concluding that our salvation is *not* conditioned upon our faith. In fact, the exact opposite is seen in Scripture: Christ's atonement was for all, indeed for the whole world, and God's salvation is conditional – and that condition is faith in Christ.² (144)

Here then is the Reformed Arminian understanding of how one may be found in Christ. It is simply *by faith*, and it is *open to all*. Whether there is a general atonement and a universal call, or a limited atonement and a particular call should take into account the following passages:

- God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ 2Co 5:19
- For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men Tit 2:11
- But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself Jn 1:9
- He is the atoning sacrifice for sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world 1Jn 2:2
- The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance 2Pe 3:9

Likewise, considering what the Bible says about salvation conditioned on faith should take into account the following passages:

- ...that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him Jn 3:15
- Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son Jn 3:18
- Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him Jn 3:36
- They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household' Ac 16:31

The Calvinist will reply that if the call of God goes out to all and the grace of God comes to all, then one cannot believe in total depravity. Not so. The Calvinist once again is reading into the equation his *a priori* particularistic mindset. Arminius affirmed total depravity. Disagreement arises over how God has sovereignly chosen to solve the problem of the human predicament. The Calvinist solves it by asserting unconditional election which effects salvation by irresistible grace. We are only considering a *logical question* as to how God would sovereignly choose to effect

² Every Calvinist will agree that our faith is the condition of our salvation; John Owen specifically said so. But Calvinists will not agree with Arminius that faith *causes* or *triggers* our salvation by our own act of will, and that every man is capable of that act. Instead, faith is merely the "instrument" by which we receive the gift of God. In no way is it meritorious or distinguishing of itself. Ashby apparently embraces this view (see quote on p. 6 below). But the Calvinist goes further by claiming that only the elect have saving faith, because only the elect are given faith as a gift (Eph 2:8-9); and because "without faith it is impossible to please God." The issue is how we come to have faith. Arminius argues that it is made possible but not inevitable by universal prevenient grace. He binds it to *Free Will*. Calvinists argue that it is irresistibly evoked in the elect by the will of God and the activity of the Holy Spirit; they bind it to God's *Sovereignty*. And that's the hinge of the debate between the two.

salvation for mankind.³ Logically, however, God could just as well have chosen to irresistibly save all of mankind in the Calvinist scheme.⁴ Reformed Arminians solve the issue of total depravity with universal enabling grace (*prevenient grace*).⁵ “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” Tit 2:11 (145-146)

The Calvinist responds that “If all are enabled and all are drawn, then universalism must surely result – all would be saved.” To which I would say, “Yes, *if* God’s grace were irresistible grace.” Once again however, God can sovereignly choose that his salvation is not going to proceed along the lines of a deterministic, cause-and-effect relationship. Rather, he is going to allow the sinner to resist the offer of grace which he has sovereignly enabled the sinner to accept. “I want to reiterate that nothing proposed here diminishes God’s sovereignty or his grace. The foregoing is a perfectly logical construct of how a sovereign God might choose to effect his gracious salvation for sinful humanity.”⁶ (147)

Reformed Arminianism’s *Similarities* to Other Arminians

“Reformed Arminians agree with nearly every conservative Arminian writer on the philosophical question of determinism and free will. In this view, God is sovereign, but he has chosen that his foreknowledge will be conditioned on the actual and contingent actions of his free creatures. One should not infer from this that humankind, prior to being excited and enabled by God’s grace, has the power of alternative choice with reference to doing spiritual good. Total depravity, inherited from our father Adam, has rendered the natural human being spiritually dead and helpless before a holy God.” It is not some sort of absolute or Pelagian freedom.

As for soteriology, all Arminians agree that salvation is conditional. God’s election to salvation is thus conditional. There is some disagreement as to whether election is corporate or individual, but the conditional nature of it is not in debate. “Christ’s atoning work is universal in its scope and may be obtained by any sinner who will not resist the drawing and enabling power of the Holy Spirit. That right response is a response of faith and repentance, two sides of the same coin, which produces God’s regenerating grace in the life of the sinner, rendering him or her a child of God.” (148)

God’s grace does not totally overwhelm the sinner’s will. Rather, God’s grace works through “suasion”, *influencing* sinners, *drawing* them toward God, *enabling* them to respond in faith. The reason for this is that God works with his human creation in light of the creature’s personhood. God’s grace is thus resistible grace, from start to finish, both before and after salvation.⁷ (149)

³ Ashby implies that Scripture is silent as to the means and that no clear Scripture exists either way. The Calvinist disagrees and brings to bear the necessity of irresistible grace using all those passages describing the character and attributes of God, and the nature and effect of an *expiatory* sacrifice – what does that sacrifice accomplish, and for whom?

⁴ Except that Scripture contradicts it: “I have kept all except the one doomed to perdition.” Jn 17:12; Therefore...

⁵ In other words, since there is no Scriptural support for it, and all we’re dealing with here is a logical argument, this bit of logic works just as well as the Calvinist scheme. But, as I indicated in FN 3, it isn’t just a logical argument; it’s scriptural.

⁶ Ashby is arguing that God sovereignly chooses to limit his sovereignty; however, God’s omnipotence would end at that point, and Ashby does not address that consequence other than making a bare assertion that it doesn’t. Again, his is a purely logical argument, as he admits – ironically, it is the very accusation he lays at the feet of the Calvinist.

⁷ God, in this view, is unwilling to disrespect a man by *forcing* him into salvation. The Calvinist never makes such an assertion. Men come to God most willingly. Once their ears are unstopped, and the scales are removed from their eyes, they can hear the Gospel and see God’s grace (Jn 8:43) Their hearts of stone are turned into hearts of flesh (Ezek 36:26).

Reformed Arminianism's *Differences* with Other Arminians

Chief among these differences is the meaning of Christ's atonement. Reformed Arminians hold to a penal satisfaction view, and to the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers. This imputation is the only ground of their justification before a holy God. They enter into this legal standing before God by faith. Hence they are justified solely on the merits of Christ's work, which God graciously accounts to those who trust him.

Most Arminians do not hold to the forensic view. Wesley argued that God's unerring wisdom cannot think a man innocent, or to consider him righteous or holy, simply because another is so. He cannot confuse us with Christ any more than he can confuse us with David or Abraham. In its place, most Arminians accept Hugo Grotius' view which is called the governmental theory.⁸ Wesley and his followers varied from it in part and agreed with it in part. The government theory says that the atonement does not satisfy any "internal principle of the divine nature" (i.e. God's justice), but only the necessities of government. Key elements of this view:

1. God cannot pardon sin without an adequate demonstration of his displeasure
2. Christ's sufferings were an *example* of what sin deserved, not a *payment* for sin.
3. The suffering and death of Christ demonstrated the need for sin to be punished. (149-150)

Thus Christ's atonement is considered a public display which teaches a moral lesson (and that's called Pelagianism). Methodist theologian John Miley suggested, in this vein, that punishment for sin may be just, but it isn't necessary. He also suggested that the mediation of Christ was not the only possible manner of human redemption! And so the government theory asserts that Christ's righteousness and his death are not imputed to the believer, but it does maintain public justice while allowing God to pardon sinners without further punishment. Reformed Arminians strongly disagree with this view.

Arminians also reject full sanctification in this life. The Reformed view is that we are completely sanctified in Christ *positionally* (by the imputation of his righteousness), but we are not completely sanctified in *practice*. That forces us to remain completely dependent on Christ for our justification. We are sanctified by truth and by faith, so that sin is no longer our master. But we must appropriate the enabling power of the Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Arminius takes the Reformed view. He said, "The External Instrument is the Word of God; the Internal one is faith yielded to the word preached: For the word does not sanctify, only as it is preached, unless the faith is added by which the hearts of men are purified." (150-153)

The Wesleyan view has no use for the Reformed concept of imputation. They refer to it as a "legal and absurd fiction." This is the same claim made against Luther and the Reformers by the Roman Catholic Church. The issue is simple: Is my acceptance before God based entirely on what Christ has done, or am I accepted based partly on what Christ has done (imputed righteousness) and partly on what I have done (inherent righteousness)? "Wesley's views were a synthesis of the Catholic ethic of holiness (love), the Protestant ethic of grace (law), and the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the Christian life (transformation of being)." When we look at the Wesleyan concept of "entire sanctification" or "Christian perfection" we see the idea of the heart of a sanctified person acting out of "perfect love." However, the popular understanding is that

⁸ Grotius was the father of International Law, and a Socinian (i.e., he rejected the Trinity and original sin).

sinlessness is what should be achieved by a definitive second work of grace in the life of the sinner who has been pardoned. (154)

Classical Calvinism and Perseverance

1. If *sovereignty* can only be sovereign when God acts in a cause-and-effect relationship with his creation, even his human creation, and
2. If *grace* can only be gracious when it is applied in a manner that cannot be resisted, and
3. If *election* can only be of God when it is unconditional and particularistic,

Then Calvinism is obviously correct.

However, these are Calvinist presuppositions. The system is logically tight if those presuppositions are necessarily true. But they are not.

1. If God in his *sovereignty* is powerful enough and his knowledge is great enough to maintain control and accomplish his purposes while allowing real contingency into his universe, and
2. If God's *grace* is still unmerited favor though he allows his human creatures the possibility of resisting its application, and
3. If the *election* of God for salvation is conditioned on faith in Christ, and if salvation is offered to all and made possible (but not inevitable) by the drawing power and enabling grace of his Holy Spirit,

Then Calvinism is not correct.

These too are presuppositions. But if they are necessarily true, then just as Calvinism is logically tight, so is Reformed Arminianism. Salvation is conditioned on faith in Christ. Since God has chosen to deal with his human creation in terms of their personhood, by influence and response rather than through cause and effect, he allows us to resist his grace – though he has enabled us to receive it.⁹ If we exercise our God-given, personal freedom after salvation and reject Christ who saved us, then logically we must admit that it is possible for one who has been in Christ to exit by the same door of faith that God ordained as the way into union with Christ. See Heb 6:4, 10:29; 1Tim 1:19. (155-156)

For Reformed Arminians, freedom means freedom from deterministic necessity, not freedom to choose under coercion, irresistibly. Faith must truly be a person's own response. It is not simply the effect of a determining external or internal cause. Nor is it the freedom to get on and off a bus at will. Reformed Arminians propose the following rubric for the *ordo salutis*:

1. Prior to being drawn and enabled, one is unable to believe... able only to resist.
2. Having been drawn and enabled, but prior to regeneration, one is able to believe... able also to resist.
3. After one believes, God then regenerates; one is able to continue believing... able also to resist.
4. Upon resisting to the point of unbelief, one is unable again to believe... able only to resist.

⁹ This idea of dignity and respect for our "personhood" is very PC, but Ashby cites no texts for it since he considers it a logical rather than a Scriptural question. Does Phil 2:13 respect our personhood if God influences us for His own ends? "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purposes."

The reason persons in 1 and 4 are unable to believe and able only to resist is because God is not drawing or enabling them. (159) But the initial freedom to believe is God-given, and it remains in effect after salvation; we are not once-saved, always saved, as Charles Stanley would have it. And so eternal security, like salvation, is based on the presence of faith which keeps us in Christ, continuing the imputation of his righteousness without which no man is saved. Salvation by faith is therefore not a single event, but an event followed by a continuing exercise of faith. (160-164)

These benefits and blessings are mine only and always because I am in Christ. As R.T. Kendall has said, Jesus Christ alone serves as the meritorious cause of our justification. But there is an instrumental cause, that being faith alone. It is not merely God's "declaring me righteous" that somehow magically or mystically makes me righteous. God has ordained that there be an instrumental cause in salvation – faith in Christ. This is the condition of salvation. And the need for it does not vanish the moment an individual is saved. If salvation is conditional, it is conditional throughout ("a righteousness that is by faith from first to last" Rom 1:17)

That conditionality applies to the doctrine of perseverance as well. The issue in question is whether one is in Christ or not. One is found to be in Christ *only by faith*. If one is outside of Christ, he or she is unjustified. If one is in Christ, he or she is justified. To the justified ones are rendered all the benefits of salvation. Yet the instrumental cause of justification is *faith in Christ*. (163)¹⁰

Response to the Scriptural Case for Eternal Security

To answer the issue of whether a believer may lose his or her salvation, we need to examine the passages relied on by the Calvinists to support their theory of perseverance – it may be that they suggest something quite different.

1. *What Jesus means by "belief."* Charles Stanley believes that such belief is a one-time event, a momentary act that can never be undone. The Greek grammar of the texts he relies on, however, show that our belief is an ongoing active faith, not a momentary declaration. They use the present tense participle, meaning our belief takes place in the present and then continues in a progressive fashion (it has an "-ing" suffix).

- Jn 3:15 "... that everyone who is believing may have eternal life in him"
- Jn 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever is believing in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."
- Jn 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever is hearing my word and is believing him who sent me, has eternal life..."
- Jn 6:35 "...he who is believing in me will never be thirsty."
- Jn 6:40 "For my Father's will is that everyone who is looking to the Son and is believing in him shall have eternal life."
- Jn 10:27-28 "My sheep are listening to my voice; I am knowing them, and they are following me. I am giving them eternal life..."

¹⁰ And therefore, Ashby would assert, we are responsible to maintain our salvation by faith, or else lose it. So the question here is not whether we can lose our *salvation*, but whether we can lose our *faith*. Ashby considers this a one-shot deal. Once you're saved, you can lose your faith – but *only* once. Those who have a crisis of faith at any point in their life so as to fall into unbelief for a time, will have no second drawing of the Holy Spirit, no return to the fold. That's a stiff price to pay, and a heavy burden to bear for any believer; and I think it's an unbiblical stance to take (1Co 5:5; Gal 6:1; Jms 5:20). Ashby doesn't define the type of unbelief that loses salvation.

It's no small thing to change the grammatical emphasis from *believing as a process*, which is yielding eternal life, to *belief as a momentary act*, which one may walk away from the moment after believing – and with no adverse consequences.¹¹ (164-165)

2. *The possibility that one's spiritual condition may change.* Those who assert eternal security cite verses such as Jn 5:24 and Jn 10:27-28. Robert Picirilli compares Jn 5:24, "He that believes shall not come into condemnation," with Jn 3:36, "He that does not believe shall not see life." We see that they are parallel in their structure. Picirilli says,

Grammatically, if the first means that the condition of the believer cannot be changed, then the second means that the condition of the unbeliever likewise cannot be changed. In fact, neither passage is even speaking to that issue... Each promise applies with equal force to those who persist in the respective state described. (165)¹²

F. Leroy Forlines makes a similar argument with regard to Jn 10:28 "No one can pluck them out of my hand." Comparing this to Jn 3:36, Forlines says,

No one says that, since it is said of the unbeliever that he shall not see life he is permanently bound without hope in that condition. It is a fact that as an unbeliever, he shall not see life, but if he becomes a believer, he will see life... Where is the contradiction when it is said that a believer "shall not perish," but if he becomes an unbeliever he will perish? The fact is that a believer, as long as he remains a believer, "shall not perish." (166)¹³

From the definition of "belief" in number 1 above, we see that those who are being spoken of in Jn 10:28 are those who are hearing his voice, those who are following him. It is to *them* that he is giving eternal life, and who will never perish. Thus, those who continue believing cannot be plucked from God's hand.¹⁴

3. *Texts giving assurance that all true believers will be saved.* Several of these texts are Jn 17:12,¹⁵ Eph 1:13-14,¹⁶ 1Pet 1:5,¹⁷ and 1Jn 5:13.¹⁸ Reformed Arminians do not argue for saved *un-believers* (once saved, always saved), but for believers only. God will not turn away a single believer. Not

¹¹ Ashby's assumption is that belief is here today, gone tomorrow, without conviction or consequence. That sort of intellectual assent is not saving faith as the Bible describes it, nor is it what Calvinists would consider "belief." Belief is ongoing trust in Christ alone as evidenced by a transform-*ing* life (James: "faith without works is dead").

¹² And the Calvinist would agree – we are all lost in our unregenerate state. But what happens to those who are regenerated by God, versus those who are not (and God's wrath abides on them), is eternal by its very nature. The first group (the elect) have been *transported* from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son. There they are kept by Christ, not by their own hand or their own will – and that's the basis of Jn 10:28.

¹³ There is that logical argument again, but one which disregards the preponderance of Scripture. Take a dog that lives if it does not get run over. It gets run over and dies. If it is not run over again, does it live? The logic is faulty.

¹⁴ Granted. But what is it that will cause their saving faith to be lost (to stop believing) in opposition to God's will for his elect? "I am convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." Rom 8:35-39

¹⁵ Jn 17:12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹⁶ Eph 1:13-14 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory.

¹⁷ 1 Pe 1:3-5 - In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

¹⁸ 1 John 5:13 - I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

one will be lost – for they are “kept by the power of God *through faith* unto salvation” (1Pet 1:5). (166)

4. *Texts not teaching what is being argued.* Some texts used to support eternal security simply do not teach what is being argued. Geisler, for example, points to Rom 8:16.¹⁹ This doesn’t speak to unconditional security, but to the benefits possessed by those who are in Christ. If that union is broken by unbelief, then the benefits are gone. Rom 8:35-39²⁰ also fits into this category. This passage is not dealing with whether a saved person can ever be lost again. It is teaching that one who is a child of God can never at the same time be separated from the love of God.²¹

5. *Texts indicating that God will continue the work he has begun.* Such verses as Phil 1:6,²² 2Th 3:3,²³ 2Ti 1:12,²⁴ 4:18,²⁵ and Jude 24-25²⁶ are thought to show the unalterable perseverance of the saints. However, these verses and others like them are expressions of thanksgiving and confidence that God will remain faithful in doing his part. “But the paraenetic²⁷ sections of Scripture show that he demands that his free creatures continue in the faith in order to partake in his blessings fully and finally.” (167)

A Response to logical arguments for Eternal Security

Arg 1 – *If one could be removed from the Body of Christ, it would be maimed.* Ans: Scripture does not teach that Christ is complete in us, but that we are complete in Christ (Col 2:10).

Arg 2 – *If one is a child of God, then no matter what happens, one cannot cease to be a child of God.* Ans. You cannot equate a spiritual relationship with a natural relationship; if a spiritual relationship can never be broken, then it would be impossible for anyone ever to be saved.²⁸ “If it is true when applied to a child of God, then logical consistency would demand that “children of the devil” (Jn 8:44) must always remain children of the devil. Thus, no one could ever become a child of God. “Once a child, always a child” is simply an invalid argument.²⁹

¹⁹ Rom 8:16 - The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

²⁰ Rom 8:35-39 - Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

²¹ Because Ashby is a universalist, he rejects the idea that there are two families in Scripture: those who are the children of God, and those who are the children of the devil – Jn 8:34-47 (also reflected in the parable of the wheat and tares – Jn 13:25+, and the seed of Eve being at war with the seed of the serpent – Gen 3:15). In Ashby’s mind, adoption is therefore a tentative and tenuous thing to be maintained, and not a permanent change in position.

²² Phil 1:6 - he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

²³ 2 Thess 3:3 - But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

²⁴ 2 Tim 1:12 - Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

²⁵ 2 Tim 4:18 - The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.

²⁶ Jude 24 - To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...

²⁷ *Paraenetic* refers to a language-event; this is part of the jargonese of the “new hermeneutic” in Scriptural interpretation. It requires that we over-ride our current understanding of the text in favor of the understanding of the original readers. That’s a good thing to do, and it corrects some of the abuses of postmodern interpretation in which the reader controls the meaning.

²⁸ See FN 21. If the relationship pre-exists regeneration (as Calvinists assert), then Ashby’s argument falls apart.

²⁹ Actually, Ashby has hit it on the head: children of the devil must always remain children of the devil, and children of God must remain children of God. Ashby refuses to recognize the possibility that children of God are the elect, who were chosen before the

Arg 3 – *One who is born again can never become unborn.* Ans. If a person becomes an apostate, the person does not become unborn but *dead* (Jn 3:15-16;³⁰ 3:36;³¹ 5:24;³² 6:54;³³ 10:28³⁴). Through apostasy, one returns to that spiritually dead state.³⁵

Arg 4 – *The believer is said to have eternal life as a present possession; it would not be eternal if you could lose it.* Ans. The same texts are used as in Arg 3. With many of these passages, I noted above, the verb tense is progressive (ongoing action – present tense participle with -ing suffix). However, the point here is different. These verses speak of eternal life, but what is it? Eternal life is not a quality of life, or a perpetual existence, but a relationship that draws upon the life of God. (Jn 1:4; 5:26; 5:39-40; 10:10; 12:50; 1Jn 5:11-13) I participate in that life only because I believe in Christ; I am forensically *in Christ*. No one outside Christ has eternal life. The life in God was eternal before I got it, and it will continue to be eternal, even if I were to forfeit it by rejecting Christ Jesus.³⁶ (168-169)

Conditional Continuence in Salvation

I granted that if the Calvinists are right, and salvation is *un*-conditional, then their argument as to perseverance will logically follow. However, there must be a willingness to consider the implications of conditional salvation. The condition of salvation is faith in Christ. Further, this condition flows through the whole of salvation, not just at its inception.³⁷

foundation of the world for redemption. He presupposes that to be an “object of wrath” (Eph 2:3) is to be a “child of the devil” (Jn 8:44). That’s a false proposition, which nonetheless leads Ashby to a correct conclusion. There are two groups who are objects of God’s wrath: his children, and the children of the devil. The one group is redeemed by Christ, and the other is not.

³⁰ John 3:15-16 - everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

³¹ John 3:36 - Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.

³² John 5:24 - whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

³³ John 6:54 - Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

³⁴ John 10:27-28 - My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

³⁵ Actually, they were never alive. Matt 7:23 “Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I *never* knew you . Away from me, you evildoers!’” and also the very same verses he quotes (FN 29-34 above)

³⁶ *Agreed.* Where Ashby misses the point of Calvinism, is that again he presumes we are placed in Christ at the moment of our conversion, as any Arminian would do. If that were true, everything Ashby asserts would be true (as he said, his is logically tight as well). But his presumption is wrong. We were united with Christ before the foundation of the world for his redemption on the cross in the fullness of time. Our conversion is the point at which the benefits of the atonement, which Ashby describes, are *applied* to the elect. *Jn 17:3 - This is eternal life: to know God. Rom 8:29-30 “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”* The word “foreknowledge” is not to be confused with “foresight”, as the Arminians do. God foreknew, i.e. he knew them beforehand, those who are his children, because he decreed who they are, not those who would become his children by their own choice. Hence Christ said to those who merely act like Christians, “I never knew you.” They were never the beneficiaries of the Redemptive Covenant, or of Christ’s Last Will and Testament which is the New Covenant in his blood. That is also the answer to Heb 6:4 and 10:29 (p. 5 above). They tasted (participated), but never ate his body or drank his blood. Read Christopher Ness’s *Antidote for Arminianism* to get a feel for the nature of God’s eternal decree which declares the elect.

³⁷ Faith is an instrumental condition, not a qualifying condition. We don’t become a child of God by faith. We acknowledge that we are one. “My sheep know me. They hear my voice and follow me.” Jn 10:14,27. The Prodigal Son wasn’t a stranger who was adopted, but a son returning to his Father. And in case you conclude that Satan must therefore have his own spawn, he does not. He is not procreative. All men are made in the image of God from the same clay, some for noble purposes and some for common. The one and only Potter may do with his clay as he chooses. Rom 9:21 from Isa 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer 18:4-6.

If divine grace is resistible prior to conversion, then it is resistible afterwards.³⁸ God does not take away our free will at the moment of conversion.³⁹ For those who believe in conditional salvation, it is clear why that condition must persist. Robert Forlines writes,

Being made in the image of God means that we are personal beings. We think, feel, and act. A person makes decisions or choices. Regardless of how much influence is brought to bear upon the will or how much assistance is given, a person's actions are in a very real sense his own. That is what it means to be a person... God made us persons. In His relationship with us, he never violates our personhood.

If God did not consider Christians to be persons who make choices (both good and bad), which are truly and significantly their own choices, then the volume of paraenetic and hortatory writings that deal with Christian behavior would not be needed.⁴⁰ (169-170)

Professor Ashby at this point proceeds to examine a number of passages he feels refute perseverance and establish apostasy so as to cost us our salvation. He does so "on strictly logical grounds." These include Heb 6:4 and 10:29 among other difficult passages.⁴¹ These are dealt with in numerous Reformed refutations, including my own, so I won't take time to repeat them here. - WHG

The Irremediable Nature of Apostasy

The NT affirms one way to lose salvation is apostasy, through defection from the faith. Such apostasy is irreparable. Once lost from the faith, we cannot be saved a second time. "It is impossible" says Heb 6:4. "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin remains..." says Heb 10:26. And yet the Wesleyan Arminian would answer that this one can be saved again. Wesley himself was inconsistent, and established a separate category of apostasy called the "back-slider" who may be remediated by penitence. (181)

Reformed Arminians, on the contrary, insist that there is only one way for a believer to lose salvation: a decisive act of apostasy, departing from the living God through unbelief (Heb 3:12). "If a saved individual ever rejects Christ, he or she will at that point have cast aside the God-appointed instrumental cause of salvation... Faith is the means whereby the sinner is brought into union with Christ and is the instrumental cause through which the benefits of salvation are mediated... When one abandons the one condition God places upon salvation, he or she enters into a spiritually lost state from which there is no possibility of returning." (182-183)

As I said, Reformed Arminians, like Arminius, wish to maintain the greatest possible distance from Pelagianism. The Roman Catholic view of "inherent righteousness" within the believer is

³⁸ That's an interesting point. The question for the Calvinist, however, is not whether grace is resistible, but whether it is *acceptable*. Depending on your view of depravity, man is not resisting God's grace but at war with his law, and *incapable* of accepting his grace. It isn't that God is forcing his grace upon anyone, but that apart from regeneration, there is no interest in it. The message of the cross is foolishness to the natural man (1Co 1:18,23; 2:14). The phrasing of the question begs the answer.

³⁹ Quite the opposite. There is no free will prior to conversion to take away. Free will, theologically, is not talking about our volitional will, our ability to make choices. It is talking about our freedom in the sense of our ability to please God – we are not free to please God; we are slaves to our sin and free only to gratify it, or deny it – but never to be free of it. That takes grace. At conversion, we actually receive our freedom of will for the first time. That's why Ashby defines free-will the way he does: "freedom from deterministic necessity"; but Scripture defines it differently (2Cor 3:17; Gal 5:1; Eph 3:12; 2Pet 2:19).

⁴⁰ The hortatory imperatives of Scripture are directed at those who enjoy God's favor and have been set free: the elect. We don't expect, and God does not implore, those who are enslaved to deny their nature. 1 Cor 5:12-13 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.

⁴¹ See Heb 3:6b,12-14; 6:4; 10:26-29, 35-39; Col 1:21-23; 1Ti 1:18-20; Gal 1:6; 4:9-11; Phil 2:15-16; 2Pe 2:20-22; Jn 15:1-6; and Rev 3:5, 22:18-19.

Pelagian. It was also held by Grotius and the governmentalists who followed him. This is not the Reformed view of the righteousness that saves nor the one to which Reformed Arminians subscribe. Believers are justified by Christ's righteousness alone, imputed to them by God because of their faith in Christ. Inherent righteousness is related to the believer's growth in grace. It is a matter of progressive sanctification, not salvation. The governmental view has been the prevailing understanding of the Wesleyan Arminians. Wesley's concern with the Reformed view is that it leads to antinomianism instead of holiness. His typical phrase is that the believer is justified "for the sake of" Christ rather than justified on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone. That little difference from the Reformed view is critical. It suggests that God does not actually consider Christ's righteousness as being offered on behalf of and in place of the righteousness of the elect. It is as if we try, and however far we fall short, Christ makes up the difference – or that we are forgiven only up to the point at which we profess faith in Christ, and then our righteousness is considered.⁴² (183-185)

"For Wesley, if a believer sins, he cannot know if he was previously saved – maybe yes, maybe no. He can only know that having sinned, he is of his father, the devil. I do not know how to interpret such a view other than to say that if a believer commits a single sin, that sin renders him lost – he being once again a child of the devil, until the moment he repents... It hints at one of the major differences between Reformed Arminians and Wesleyan Arminians. For Reformed Arminians, only one kind of 'break with the Father' can occur. It occurs through apostasy, and it has no remedy."⁴³ (186)

SUMMARY

Sin in the life of the believer is a serious matter. God takes it seriously, the church should take it seriously, and the individual must take it seriously as well. Committing sin after being saved does not make us unjustified. Only rejecting and renouncing faith in Christ will do that. But once it is done, that singular act of apostasy is irreversible (Heb 6:4-6).

⁴² Either way, this amounts to Christ plus, and not Christ alone for our salvation.

⁴³ It would be nice to know at which point prolonged sin, or being mastered by a sin, so dominates us as to constitute *willful* unbelief. Does the death of a spouse or a child, which may enrage us emotionally against God, so constitute a rejection of Christ or the grace of God, as to cause us to fall into apostasy? Were David's sins of adultery and murder, and his cries of despair, and the doubts he expressed in the Psalms sufficient to do it? If not these, then what is apostasy? If Baal worship did not stop God's pleas to his people to repent and be cleansed, then what must we do to be separated from the love of God? Does mental illness or Alzheimer's lose us our salvation because we cannot maintain our faith? Does an infant's inability to express his or her faith, or a teenager's inability to grasp the consequences of rejecting Christ cost them their salvation when they do? How long and how wide must the gap be that Christ cannot cover with his blood? Just how impotent is Christ to save the elect, or the Spirit to sanctify them? Should we even ask, and risk insulting the "personhood" of God?