

The Sovereignty of God In Salvation

Gods' Sovereignty In Salvation

In a discussion about God's Sovereignty in regard to salvation several things must be considered. This matter includes not only the nature of God, but also the nature of man. Since mankind has fallen into sin, it is necessary for Him to be saved, thus the doctrine of Salvation. What follows then is a discussion of how God's Eternal purpose in Christ to redeem His people from their sins comes about. How is it that redemption takes place, and what are the issues involved as they are described in the Bible. It must be understood that God is not only Sovereign in Creation and in Providence, but also in the application of redemption. All of these things happened according to God's purpose in Christ.

Matthew 1:21 - "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is **He who will save His people from their sins.** NASB

2 Timothy 1:9-10 - 9 who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, **not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace** which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, NASB

It is important to understand that the Bible has much to say about this doctrine of Salvation. In order to understand biblical teaching, and because of much false teaching and controversy through the years of Church history, these matters have been broken down into categories which help us to clarify the issues. These include but are not limited to.....

- God's Nature
- Man's Nature
- The Nature of Salvation
- The Nature and extent of the Atonement(Christ's physical death)

These categories exist because of the way the Bible presents the different teachings about salvation.

The Doctrine of Salvation in Church History

There have been many and varied controversies down through the history of the church, not only with the doctrines of salvation, but with all doctrines. This is because of the obvious war against the truth being waged by the enemy of the Church, even Satan himself. This happens chiefly through the diabolical efforts of false teachers, who either, knowingly or ignorantly, distort and pervert the truth.

2 Peter 2:1-2 - 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just **as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies**, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; NASB

These false teachers take advantage of immature Christians with little knowledge of the Bible. The **Bible plainly declares** that those who are led away by false teachers are **"children"** and **"barely escaping those who live in error."** It is incumbent then and therefore for Christians not to be led astray from the truth by false teachers and false doctrines, but rather very discerning about it, so as to grow up in their salvation and in the knowledge of God and our precious salvation in Christ.

2 Peter 2:18-19 - 18 For speaking out arrogant words of vanity **they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, 19 promising them freedom** while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. NASB

Ephesians 4:14-15 - 14 As a result, **we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;** 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, NASB

However, one great benefit of the controversies caused by false teachers is that it helps the Church to clarify the truth and to closely examine biblical teaching. In examining the doctrine of Salvation in Church history, a brief overview of the major controversies will help us to clearly see the matters at stake, so we can examine the Bible closely to understand its clear teaching.

Pelagius and Augustine

One of the first major controversies on the doctrine of salvation was one introduced by a man named Pelagius. Pelagius was born in England in 354 A.D. and was an ascetic monk there. He later became a popular teacher in the church in Rome. Pelagius was the author of many false teachings summarized below.....

- He denied Original Sin –
 - Mind, will, emotions were not corrupted by the Fall
- Man had natural ability to obey God's commands
 - Man's will is not in bondage to sin
 - Man could attain Heaven by good works(salvation was by Law or Gospel)
- Divine Grace is not necessary for Salvation
- Sinless Perfection could be attained
- Prescient View of Predestination
- Christians can lose salvation

The chief antagonist of the Pelagian doctrines was Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo. Augustine opposed Pelagianism, teaching that man's nature is corrupted by the Fall, including all of Adam's progeny, and that man's will is in bondage to sin, (being dead in transgressions and sin), and that Divine Grace in Regeneration was necessary in Salvation. Augustine taught that Salvation was totally God's work and that He was due the Glory for it. The chart below pictures the contrast of the two teachings.

Doctrine	Pelagianism	Augustianism
Original Sin	Denied	Affirmed
Natural Will	Ability to obey perfectly	Inability
Grace	Not Necessary	Absolutely necessary
Sinless Perfection	Can be attained	Cannot be attained

Pelagianism became a doctrinal system held by many in the early church. But after close scrutiny in many church councils, it was condemned in 416 and 418 at the **Councils of Carthage**, which assembled to take action concerning the errors of Caelestius, a disciple of Pelagius. It denounced the Pelagian doctrines of human nature, original sin; grace and perfectibility, and fully approved the contrary views of Augustine. Further, the Semi-Pelagian teaching was also condemned as heresy in the second Council of Orange in 529 A.D. **The Council of Orange** dealt with the Semi-Pelagian doctrine that the human race, though fallen and possessed of a sinful nature, is still "good" enough to be able to lay hold of the grace of God through an act of unredeemed human will. The Council held to Augustine's view and repudiated Pelagius. Pelagianism as a structured heretical movement ceased to exist after the 6th century but its essential ideas continue to cause disputes and controversies throughout the history of the Church and even today.

Luther and Erasmus

The German Reformer Martin Luther had a profound affect on the Church. His efforts, along with those of Calvin, Zwingli and others, literally spawned the Protestant Reformation. Of course the main issue at stake with Martin Luther had to do with salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. However, during his ministry he dealt with many doctrinal issues, bringing much needed reform to almost every area of theology. As Luther was in the course of his ministry, a sharp disagreement arose between himself and a Roman Catholic teacher by the name of Erasmus. This disagreement focused sharply on the doctrines of man's nature and human freewill. On September 1, 1524, Erasmus published his treatise *On the Freedom of the Will*. In December of 1525, Luther responded with *The Bondage of the Will*. Luther took the position defined by *Augustinian* theology which had been the historic position of the church officially for some 1000 years. This position of course was established at the second Council of Orange in 529 A.D., but had always been the view of the Church, being clearly defined in the Bible. Erasmus took a position that was *Semi-Pelagian* in nature, maintaining that man morally able to respond to the gospel without the need for Divine Grace.

Erasmus	Luther
Semi-Pelagian	Augustinian
<u>Synergistic</u> Salvation is accomplished as man and God cooperate. Divine Grace and the human will work together for salvation to happen.	<u>Monergistic</u> Salvation is wholly the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Mankind possesses no inclination toward the Gospel in his natural state and needs Divine Grace to be enabled to believe.

Whenever a discussion of Human Freewill comes into focus, the basic issue revolves around man's nature. Several questions arise in this matter because of the clear teaching of Scripture and the sinful desire of mankind for Autonomy, his desire to be subject or accountable to no one but himself. Some of these questions are.....

- Is man's will totally free, or somehow limited in his ability to make free choice?
- Was mankind created morally able to do good and evil, and how was this affected by the Fall?
- Can mankind respond to the Gospel on his own without the need for Divine Grace or enablement?
- What role does freewill play in Predestination?
- Once man/woman are saved or regenerated, are they now able to good and evil?

The chart below shows discussions about man's nature and its freedom in different states.

State of man in history	Morally Able to do		Inclined by Nature to	
	GOOD	EVIL	GOOD	EVIL
Created	yes	yes	no	no
Fallen	no	yes	no	yes
Redeemed	yes	yes	yes	no
Glorified	yes	no	yes	no

Again the controversy over the doctrines of salvation rages on in the Church some 500 years later. These same issues and doctrines are closely related to the arguments between Calvinism and Arminianism. We will deal with these issues and questions with a detailed biblical analysis below.

Calvinism and Arminianism

As with Luther, the French Reformer John Calvin had a massive impact on the Church. His ministry was based in Geneva, Switzerland during the 16th century. Calvin was born in 1509 and lived until 1564. He is the author of his *“Institutes of the Christian Religion,”* known as one of the foremost theological works in Church History. In 1559 he founded the Geneva Academy, a Bible School which emphasized the principle of Sola Scriptura and placed a strong focus on the Authority of Scripture. Calvin placed a strong emphasis on God being the center focus of all reality, and taught that all teaching and preaching should be centered in and defined by the nature of God. He is the father of the Reformed Faith and many attribute the subsequent development of Presbyterianism to the efforts of John Calvin.

The controversy between Arminianism and Calvinism arose in Holland in the early 1600’s. The founder of the Arminian party was Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). He studied under the strict Calvinist Theodore Beza at Geneva and became a professor of theology at the University of Leyden in the Netherlands in 1603.

Gradually Arminius came to reject certain Calvinist teachings. The controversy spread all over Holland, where the Reformed Church was the overwhelming majority. The Arminians drew up their creed in Five Articles, and laid them before the state authorities of Holland in 1610 under the name Remonstrance, signed by forty-six ministers. The Calvinists responded with a Counter-Remonstrance. But the official Calvinistic response came from the Synod of Dort which was held to consider the Five Articles from November 13, 1618 to May 9, 1619. There were eighty-four members and eighteen secular commissioners. The Synod wrote what has come to be known as the Canons of Dort. These are still part of the church confession of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church. They state the Five Points of Calvinism in response to the Five Articles of the Arminian Remonstrants. So the so-called Five Points were not chosen by the Calvinists as a summary of their teaching. They emerged as a response to the Arminians who chose these five points to oppose. The chart below shows the Five Points displayed in the helpful acronym **TULIP**. This **TULIP** is an easy way to break down the main doctrines of Salvation that relate to Sovereign Grace.

The Five Points of Calvinism <i>The Five Responses to the Remonstrance at Dort</i>				
T	U	L	I	P
Total Depravity	Unconditional Election	Limited Atonement	Irresistible Grace	Perseverance of the Saints

Calvin, Arminius, or the Bible?

Who is Calvin? What is Arminius? They are simply men who have labored to try and serve the church as teachers. It is a matter of utmost importance that we view the Word of God as God’s own self-revelation to us His people and understand the importance of deriving our understanding of truth from Scripture, with a reliance upon the Holy Spirit for true spiritual discernment. Therefore it is important to acknowledge that however helpful men may be in helping to clarify doctrinal issues, it is the Word of God which is true and only by the Holy Spirit can it be properly understood. It is important that we not follow men, but our allegiance focus on Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:12-13 - 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 **Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he?** Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? NASB

Calvinist or Arminian?

Another problem that arises in this type of discussion is one of labels such as “*Calvinist*” or “*Arminian*.” This issue is that many times one may be typified by the label, such as “*Arminian*”, but the person applying the label does not really know the true meaning of the term, nor do they understand the doctrinal issues at stake. In discussion, a person may be labeled a “*Calvinist*”, yet those giving the label and the one being labeled have different views of meaning of the term “Calvinist.” This can create tremendous confusion when trying to discuss biblical doctrine and understand God’s Holy truth as many of these issues can be quite controversial and emotionally charged. An even greater problem is one of **ignorance of Holy Scripture**. One might endeavor to discuss these matters at length, but not really have a good grasp on the issue in the Bible, not having looked closely at all of the Bible references, in their context, to gain a proper understanding of the issue at hand. When this happens, we are left to trying to grasp supernatural Divine realities with our natural earthly understanding, and the matter becomes one of human appraisal of wisdom and truth, instead of Divine revelation of heavenly Light. The **Scripture plainly declares** that such matters are grasped only by spiritual discernment, not by mere human powers of reason and logic.

1 Corinthians 2:11-14 - 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so **the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.** 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **that we might know the things freely given to us by God,** 13 which things we also speak, not in words **taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.** 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and **he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.** NASB

Therefore it is important on these matters to rely upon God for insight into these high and Holy things. Anyone who has looked closely at the matters of the doctrine of salvation knows the difficulty in trying to grasp the words of Scripture on some of the finer details of Sovereign Grace.

Why is this important? What is at stake?

Consider that this controversy has arisen several times over the course of Church history as we have pointed out. Each time the debate intensifies as the matters are defined more clearly and we are exposed more comprehensively to the words of Holy Scripture. Now if these issues continue to arise and create controversy over biblical teaching, and the Church convenes with large councils of Bible scholars to make confessions of orthodoxy and pronounce judgments against heresy, then this alone may speak to us about the serious nature of the matters at hand. It is imperative that we guard the truth of God’s Word, especially knowing the schemes of Satan and false teachers, working diligently to pervert the teaching of Scripture and assault the truth of God’s Word with “*destructive heresies.*”(Gen 3:1-4, 2 Pet 2:1) Moreover, we are exhorted by God in Scripture to “*contend earnestly for the faith,*” and not to succumb to the false teachers who seek to distort the truth.

Jude 3-4 - 3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that **you contend earnestly for the faith** which was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For **certain persons have crept in unnoticed,** those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, **ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord.** Jesus Christ. NASB

The matters which are at stake in these doctrines of salvation are of grave importance. The heresies which continue to re-emerge again and again in the Church, attack the very heart of the Gospel itself. These heresies are not “*Theological or Christological*”(about God or Christ’s nature), but are *Soteriological*(about Salvation), meaning they focus on the work of Christ and how it relates to mankind. A major problem in the modern Church in regard to this matter, is one of *indifference* when it comes to the truth of God’s Word. Many Christians would rather not even try to understand these issues because of the difficult nature of grasping matters of

Predestination. I have identified several reasons below which are stated for an *indifference* to understanding these matters.

- **Controversy** – It is not worth arguing about.
- **Work of Study** – It takes too much work to understand.
- **I am only human and can't grasp God's mysteries** - Too hard to understand.
- **Offense of Sovereign Prerogative** – Some cannot accept the clear Sovereign rights of God presented in the Scripture feeling that their autonomy has been stolen.

The problem here is obviously one of *indifference*, if not a severe lack of honor and respect toward God and His Holy Word. Consider, if God deems these matters of such importance that He speaks volumes about it in Holy Writ, then it is incumbent upon us to “*hear and understand*”, and also to “*take heed*” to the things which God has spoken. Moreover, we are to love the Word of God, for it is God's revelation of Himself to us. Dear reader, what has plagued our hearts so severely that we do not earnestly desire to lay hold of God's awesome and wonderful Word which He has so freely given us? Is it not the great delight of our hearts? Consider the Words of the Psalmist and His relationship to God through Scripture.

Psalm 119:97-104 - 97 **O how I love Thy law ! It is my meditation all the day.** 98 Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. 99 I have more insight than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation. 100 **I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Thy precepts.** 101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Thy word. 102 I have not turned aside from Thine ordinances, **For Thou Thyself hast taught me.** 103 **How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!** 104 **From Thy precepts I get understanding;**

Therefore I hate every false way. NASB

Dear reader, if God's Holy Word is not worth contending for, then what is? And if we need to study and examine the Word many times to grasp some of its truths, why would we consider that anything less than a Divine privilege? I am concerned that many modern Evangelicals would rather sit in front of the TV eating “bon bon's” and be instructed by the devils in Hollywood, then spend time examining Holy Scripture to mine its precious truths. Should not we also expect the Word to be a mystery from Heaven requiring Divine revelation to grasp? Indeed we should, for it cannot be apprehended by mere human powers of reason and logic. And if we examine Holy Scripture, and there encounter a Sovereign God who has made everything for His own purpose, including ourselves, and He likens us to clay in the hands of a potter, should we not willingly surrender to His Divine molding to shape us into a vessel for His own purpose? Or shall we find ourselves rebelling against the King of Heaven in protest that He has no right over us because we are free to do our own will? Shall the clay protest against the potter about its purpose for existence? This is the very argument of Paul in Romans chapter nine.

Romans 9:19-21 - 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? **The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay,** to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? NASB

No Middle Ground

Now when we come to doctrines in the Bible, one great tool of the enemy is to make an issue unclear so that we cannot discern the truth. This is especially important on the issues related to Predestination. But consider that on any one point of these doctrines, they are either true or not true, indeed that cannot be somewhere in the middle. Notice how with these issues below, they are either one way or the other, but cannot be somewhere in the middle.

- **Total Depravity** – Either man is able to understand and believe the Gospel apart from Divine Grace OR He is unable and must have Divine Grace to be enabled
- **Unconditional Election** – God elects people to salvation conditionally OR unconditionally
- **Eternal Security** – Either a Christian can lose his salvation OR he cannot

Calvinism and Arminianism Defined

Let us look at the controversy here and it will become clear just what is at stake. God has said volumes about these matters in Scripture and we should therefore pay careful attention to the words of Scripture in regard to these matters. The chart below will bring some clarity as to what matters were being debated by the Remonstrants and the Calvinists at the Synod of Dort in 1619.

Arminianism		Calvinism	
Semi-Pelagian		Augustinian	
Synergistic Salvation is accomplished as man and God cooperate. Divine Grace and the human will work together for salvation to happen.		Monergistic Salvation is wholly the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Mankind possesses no inclination toward the Gospel in his natural state and needs Divine Grace to be enabled to believe.	
Free Will or Human Ability Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature.	T Total Depravity	Total Inability or Total Depravity Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not--indeed he cannot--choose good over evil in the spiritual realm.	
Conditional Election God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will.	U Unconditional Election	Unconditional Election God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man.	
Universal Redemption or General Atonement Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins.	L Limited Atonement	Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners.	
The Holy Spirit Can be Effectually Resisted The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work.	I Irresistible Grace	Irresistible Grace or Effectual Calling In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ.	
Falling from Grace Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc. All Arminians have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ--that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.	P Perseverance of the Saints	Perseverance of the Saints All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.	

So by examining the controversy, the issues of biblical teaching in regard to Predestination and Salvation become clear as we see the different sides taken in the matter. It becomes clear that there is more at stake than just one or two issues but the nature of Man and of Salvation and saving Grace come into sharp focus.

The Sovereignty of God

In Salvation

The Doctrine of Salvation in the Bible – What does the Bible say?

As we examine these matters in the Bible, it is important to try to use biblical and relevant terms as much as possible in our discussion. This is because the Bible is very clear about defining its terms used to describe things, therefore when we use biblical terms we have biblical definitions which bring meaning to those terms.

TULIP is not the best

In seeking to use biblical terms, and terms which describe the issue at hand, it becomes evident that the **TULIP** acronym does not really describe the issues at stake very clearly. Therefore I have chosen other terms to describe the same Five Points which better describe the heart of the issue at hand. These five terms are....

- Natural Ability or Natural Inability
- Prescient Election or Sovereign Election
- Universal Redemption or Particular Redemption/Definite Atonement
- Human Resistance or Effectual Calling
- Falling from Grace or Eternal Security

The chart below presents these terms in contrast for clarity of the issues.

Five Important Biblical Doctrines Related to Predestination in Salvation			
Semi-Pelagian		Augustinian	
<u>Synergistic</u> Salvation is accomplished as man and God cooperate. Divine Grace and the human will work together for salvation to happen.		<u>Monergistic</u> Salvation is wholly the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Mankind possesses no inclination toward the Gospel in his natural state and needs Divine Grace to be enabled to believe.	
Man is naturally able to understand and believe the Gospel apart from Divine enablement.	Natural Ability	Natural Inability	Man is naturally unable to understand and believe the Gospel apart from Divine enablement.
The condition for salvation is faith which man exercises of his own ability. God chooses those who choose Him.	Prescient Election	Sovereign Election	The condition for salvation is the Sovereign electing will of God alone.
Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone.	Universal Redemption	Particular Redemption	Christ did in fact secure the salvation of His Church individually and definitely.
Man's will is free and he can successfully resist the Spirit's call.	Human Resistance	Effectual Calling	The calling of God to the elect does effect salvation infallibly.
Because faith is the necessary condition for Salvation, it can be lost when man discontinues his faith.	Falling from Grace	Eternal Security	The nature of saving faith is eternal and cannot be reversed.

Having now used more relevant and biblical terms about these matters, let us now look to the Bible for clarity on these issues.