

Calvinism and Arminianism, Lesson 1: Introduction

Opening Exercise: Without using any helps (e.g., Google), identify which statements are Calvinistic and which statements are Arminian.

Exhibit A

Article 3

That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do anything that is truly good (such as having faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the word of Christ, John xv. 5: "Without me ye can do nothing."

Exhibit B

Article VII – Of Original or Birth Sin

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.

Article VIII – Of Free Will

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

Exhibit C

CHAPTER IV – Primitive Man, and His Fall

Our first parents, in their original state, were upright. They naturally preferred and desired to obey their Creator, and had no preference or desire to transgress His will until they were influenced and inclined by the tempter to disobey God's commands. Previous to this, the only tendency of their nature was to do righteousness. In consequence of the first transgression, the state under which the posterity of Adam came into the world is so different from that of Adam that they have not that righteousness and purity which Adam had before the fall; they are not willing to obey God, but are inclined to evil. Hence, none, by virtue of any natural goodness and mere work of their own, can become the children of God, but they are all dependent for salvation upon the redemption effected through the blood of Christ, and upon being created anew unto obedience through the operation of the Spirit. . .

CHAPTER IX – Repentance

The repentance which the Gospel requires includes a deep conviction, a penitential sorrow, an open confession, a decided hatred, and an entire forsaking of all sin. This repentance God has enjoined on all men; and without it in this life the sinner must perish eternally.

CHAPTER XI – Regeneration

As man is a fallen and sinful being, he must be regenerated in order to obtain salvation. This change is an instantaneous renewal of the heart by the Holy Spirit, whereby the penitent sinner receives new life, becomes a child of God, and is disposed to serve Him. This is called in Scripture being born again, born of the Spirit, being quickened, passing from death unto life, and a partaking of the divine nature.

Exhibit D

V. Sin, Original and Personal

5. We believe that sin came into the world through the disobedience of our first parents, and death by sin. We believe that sin is of two kinds: original sin or depravity, and actual or personal sin.

5.1. We believe that original sin, or depravity, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which everyone is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is averse to God, is without spiritual life, and inclined to evil, and that continually. We further believe that original sin continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until the heart is fully cleansed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

VII. Prevenient Grace

7. We also believe that the human race's creation in Godlikeness included the ability to choose between right and wrong, and that thus human beings were made morally responsible; that through the fall of Adam they became depraved so that they cannot now turn and prepare themselves by their own natural strength and works to faith and calling upon God.

VIII. Repentance

8. We believe that repentance, which is a sincere and thorough change of the mind in regard to sin, involving a sense of personal guilt and a voluntary turning away from sin, is demanded of all who have by act or purpose become sinners against God.

Exhibit E

8. Personal Choice

We believe that humanity's creation in the image of God included ability to choose between right and wrong. Thus individuals were made morally responsible for their choices. But since the fall of Adam, people are unable in their own strength to do the right. This is due to original

sin, which is not simply the following of Adam's example, but rather the corruption of the nature of each human, and is reproduced naturally in Adam's descendants. Because of it, humans are very far gone from original righteousness, and by nature are continually inclined to evil. They cannot of themselves even call upon God or exercise faith for salvation. . . .

11. Repentance and Faith

We believe that for men and women to appropriate what God's . . . grace has made possible, they must voluntarily respond in repentance and faith. The ability comes from God, but the act is the individual's.

Repentance is prompted by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. It involves a willful change of mind that renounces sin and longs for righteousness, a godly sorrow for and a confession of past sins, proper restitution for wrongdoings, and a resolution to reform the life. Repentance is the precondition for saving faith, and without it saving faith is impossible. Faith, in turn, is the only condition of salvation. It begins in the agreement of the mind and the consent of the will to the truth of the gospel, but issues in a complete reliance by the whole person in the saving ability of Jesus Christ and a complete trusting of oneself to Him as Savior and Lord.

Notes

Homework

1. Can you identify misunderstandings that you once had about Calvinism? What was the source of your misunderstanding?
2. If you once misunderstood Calvinism but are now a Calvinist, what changed your mind?
3. Calvinists and Arminians may become angry when discussing these issues. Why do you suppose this is the case?
4. What are some reasons why Calvinism has been so controversial? Which of these reasons are inevitable and which are avoidable?
5. What are some steps that Calvinists might take to make Calvinism less offensive to those who either are opposed to the doctrines or are hearing them for the first time?
6. Since Calvinism is controversial, is it wise to simply keep quiet about it?¹

¹ Questions adapted from: Jim Scott Orrick, *Mere Calvinism* (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R, 2019).