

Eternal Security ~ Part 18

Arminian Theology ~ Part 4

In my last post, we continued to drill down into **Arminian Theology**. In this post, we will conclude our presentation of **Arminian Theology**. As a reminder, in order to ensure that I present the material on this topic and **Calvinistic Theology** without any preconceived bias, I have elected to utilize *"The Moody Handbook of Theology"* by Paul Enns as my source document.

Terms of Salvation

Human responsibility in salvation involves knowledge of sin, turning from sin, turning toward God, and faith in Christ. Repentance has the idea of change. To repent means that sin must be forsaken; change has taken place. Repentance, therefore, involves action; moreover, repentance, comes before faith.

John Wesley (an **Arminian**) defined saving faith in three terms: *(1) to put one's trust in the mercy and forgiveness of God; (2) to receive assurance in the Believer's life for instance, that Jesus is the Son of God; (3) to express reliance upon Christ, turning one's life over to Christ as Lord.* For Wesley, belief is ultimately expressed in obedience. This is in agreement with Arminians today who also emphasize the importance of works as a condition or result of salvation.

Meaning of the Atonement

Arminians generally hold to the governmental view of the death of Christ, which, as taught by Grotius, teaches that Christ did not die a substitutionary death for sinners. Christ suffered to satisfy the justice or government of God. Instead of dying for mankind, Christ made a *"token payment"* that satisfied the government of God. God therefore sets aside the requirement of the law and forgives sinners on the basis that His government has been upheld and honored.

Extent of the Atonement

Arminians teach that the atonement of Christ was universal. *"This does not mean that all mankind will be unconditionally saved, but that the sacrificial offering of Christ so far satisfied the claims of the divine law as to make salvation a possibility for all."* The provision of Christ in His atonement is for everyone; it is sufficient for everyone to be saved (although not all are). The Scriptures emphasize universal provision (John 3:16-17; Romans 5:8, 18; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Timothy 2:4; 4:10; Hebrews 2:9; 10:29; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2; 4:14). Since Christ made provision for all, the proclamation of the Gospel is to all (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47).

Arminians also teach that the benefit of the atonement includes the following:

- (1) The continued existence of the race. It is hardly conceivable that the race would have been allowed to multiply in its sin and depravity, had no provision been made for its salvation.
- (2) The restoration of all men to a state of solvability. The atonement provided for all men unconditionally, the free gift of grace. This included the restoration of the Holy Spirit to the race as the Spirit of enlightenment, striving and conviction. Thus man is not only given the capacity for a proper probation, but is granted the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit.
- (3) The salvation of those who die in infancy. We must regard the atonement as accomplishing the actual salvation of those who die in infancy.

Salvation May Be Lost

Arminians have adhered to the doctrine that believers can lose their salvation. Although **Arminius** himself did not clearly state that Believers could be lost, his conclusions pointed in that direction. **Arminius** taught that man is saved by grace but not apart from his free will. The will remains free. **Arminius** emphasized that the free will had to concur in perseverance, otherwise the Believer could be lost.

John Wesley also taught that the believer may "*make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, that he may fall, not only foully, but finally, so as to perish forever.*" The basis for losing one's salvation is found in passages like Luke 13:14; Colossians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 6:4-6; and 1 Peter 1:10.

Summary Evaluation of Arminian Theology

Arminianism stresses a number of important features. The emphasis on man's responsibility is surely a Biblical factor: man must believe to be saved (John 3:16; Acts 16:31). If man refuses to believe, he is lost (John 5:40; 7:17). **Arminianism's** emphasis on the universality of the atonement is also biblical (1 Timothy 4:10; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2).

Several features within Arminianism should be evaluated:

- (1) **Arminianism** denies the imputation of sin; no one is condemned eternally because of original sin. Man is condemned because of his own sins. This appears at variance with Romans 5:12-21.
- (2) Though variously interpreted, **Arminians** generally teach that the effects of the Fall were erased through prevenient grace bestowed on all men, enabling individuals to cooperate with God in salvation. There is, however, no clear indication of this kind of prevenient grace in Scripture.
- (3) **Arminians** teach that the Fall did not destroy man's free will; furthermore, they teach that prevenient grace moves upon the heart of the unbeliever, enabling him to cooperate with God in salvation by an act of the will. While it is true that man must bear responsibility in responding to the gospel (John 5:40), man's will has been affected because of the Fall (Romans 3:11-12; Ephesians 2:1); man needs God's grace in order to be saved (Ephesians 2:8; Acts 13:48; 16:14).
- (4) **Arminians** relate predestination to God's foreknowledge of man's actions. They stress that God knew beforehand who would believe, and He elected those. In **Arminianism**, election and predestination are conditioned by faith. The word *foreknowledge* (Gk. *prognosis*), however, is basically equivalent to election (cf. Romans 11:2; 1 Peter 1:20). The data of God's foreknowledge originates in advanced *planning*, not in advanced *information*.
- (5) **Arminianism** stresses human participation and responsibility in salvation: recognition of sin, turning from sin, repentance, confession, and faith. For **Arminianism**, repentance involves change of actions, forsaking sins, whereas the biblical word *repentance* (Gk. *metanoia*) means "*change of mind.*" Although the stress on human responsibilities is significant, if it involves multiple conditions for salvation, this stress becomes a serious matter because the purity of salvation-by-grace-alone is then at stake. The sole condition of salvation stressed in scores of Scriptures is faith in Christ (John 3:16, 36; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9).
- (6) **Arminianism** teaches that Believers may lose their salvation because the human will remains free and so may rescind its earlier faith in Christ by choosing sin. Frequently this view is based on controversial passages like Hebrews 6:4-6 and 2 Peter 2:20-22. The clear emphasis of Scripture, however, is that the Believer has eternal life as a present possession (John 3:16; 1 John 5:11-13) and is kept secure by Christ (John 10:28) because of what He has done (Romans 5:1; 8:1).

In my next post, I want to go back to the topic of **Election** which we briefly defined in **Eternal Security** ~ Part 2 as it applies to the **Calvinistic and Arminian Theology**.