

I'm glad you asked:

What is an Arminian?

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Arminianism is a reformed theological system of belief, which grew out of the protests by Dutch clergyman, Jacob Harmens (Arminius), who questioned theological positions of the successors to John Calvin. (The particular person was Theodore Beza, successor to Calvin and his version of predestination known as supralapsarianism. After the death of Arminius, his followers, called "Remonstrants", set forth their views in a document called "The Remonstrance". This both clarified and expanded the positions of Arminius. The five central tenets were:

- Conditional election: God elects or reprobates on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief.
- Universal atonement: Christ died for all men, and for every man, although only believers are saved.
- Total Depravity: Man is so depraved that divine grace is necessary for faith or any good deed.
- Prevenient Grace: This grace accounts for any good in mankind. It provides enablement for all men to cooperate with God's grace. It is resistible and can be made ineffectual by man's resistant will.
- Conditional Perseverance: God provides sufficient grace for all to persevere, however men may resist or neglect this provision and fall from grace eternally. (Note: On this point, Arminius chose to remain open. The issue of whether all who are truly regenerate would certainly persevere was left as a matter that "needs further investigation".)

The strictly Calvinistic Synod of Dort (1618-1619) condemned this system as heresy. Persecuted, the Remonstrants survived in the Netherlands under the leadership of men like H. Uytenbogaert (1557-1644), S. Episcopius (1583-1643), S. Curcellaeus (1586-1659), Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and others. In the 18th century, John and Charles Wesley, among others, embraced and taught a modified form of Arminianism sometimes called "evangelical Arminianism".

Today, the influence of historic Arminianism is seen throughout the evangelical world in emphases upon free will and the foreknowledge of God as the basis for predestination (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2). Arminians hold that as a believer you must "make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). Believers must "endure to the end" (Mt. 10:22; 24:13) in their belief. God supplies the grace to do this, however, the believer must supply a willing heart.

This emphasis upon the human will has often earned Arminians the accusation of "faith by works". Some of Arminius' followers (Limbourch for example.) moved away from his teaching, into a liberal and humanistic faith. Historic Arminians reject this. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Yet Jesus also said, "If anyone chooses to do God's will he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." (John 7:17). Presumably everyone has the will to choose. This willingness of heart cannot be construed to be a work that earns salvation. Salvation is all of grace, from start to finish.

The pivotal issue for Arminians is not free will, however, but rather the goodness of God. We find it impossible to avoid impugning the goodness of God in the Calvinist scheme of things. If God ordained Adam's sin in order to bring about salvation through Jesus, then how does this avoid making God the Author of sin? If God has chosen some to believe and all others to be eternally damned, without even giving them the opportunity or the ability to respond to the grace of God, then how does this avoid contradicting God's goodness? Certainly God has the right to do this, if he wished to, but is it good? An appeal to mystery at this point ignores the reality that Scripture itself affirms, "He has showed you, O man, what is good..." (Micah 6:8)

1. **Jacob Harmens (Latin: Jacobus Arminius).**

- b. 1560 Holland – d. 1609
- Studied at Leiden, 1576 – 1581.
- Influenced by Peter Ramus, 1515 – 1572. Ramian logic modified the prevailing Aristotelian logic with greater simplicity, pragmatism, and was non-dogmatic. It had an anti-cleric edge to it as well as being open to humanism.
- Educated in Geneva, 1581 – 1587 (Some of this time was spent in Basel). Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor was the primary influence in Geneva and Arminius learned from him a staunch Calvinism, known today as supralapsarianism, or double predestination. Around 1591 he came to doubt some of what he had been taught.
- Ministered in Amsterdam, 1587 – 1603.
- Professor of Divinity at Leiden (1603 – 1609) where he died after prolonged and frequent bouts of ill health.
- The year after he died, his followers signed a Remonstrance (1610) and were later expelled from the Dutch Reformed church (Synod of Dort). and persecuted until 1630 when an edict of toleration was granted.
- Arminius shares very little of himself in any of his writings. He was married to Lijsbet, September, 1590 and his death left her a widow with 9 living children ranging from 16 years to 13 months.

2. **The Calvinist TULIP and my Arminian response.**

Calvinism

Total depravity

Man is unable to do anything to effect his salvation.

Unconditional election/predestination

God sovereignly chooses those who will be saved, and, by intent or default, those who will be damned. He does this w/out consideration of man's will.

Limited atonement

Christ died for the sins of the elect only. "Sufficient for all; efficient for the elect only."

Irrresistible grace

Arminianism

Total depravity

Man is unable to do anything to effect his salvation apart from the grace of God.

Conditional predestination

God sovereignly chooses on the basis of his foreknowledge of who will 'will' to be saved and who will 'will' to persevere in that choice.

Unlimited atonement

Christ died "for the sins of the whole world." "Sufficient for all and efficient for all who believe."

Resistible grace

The elect is unable to resist the grace of God when it is offered.

Perseverance of the saints

There is nothing a saint can do to lose his eternal security with God.

The elect, as well as anyone else, is able to resist God's grace.

Saints must persevere

A saint must "endure to the end" to be saved. Those saints whom God foreknows will choose for Him and who will persevere in that willingness, will not be lost.

3. **Errors generally charged upon Arminians by their opponents.** They are five, as outlined by John Wesley, perhaps the best known of the Arminians.

- "That they deny original sin."
- "That they deny justification by faith."
- "That they deny absolute predestination."
- "That they deny the grace of God to be irresistible."
- "That they affirm, a believer may fall from grace."

"With regard to the two first of these charges, they plead, Not Guilty. They are entirely false. No man that ever lived, not John Calvin himself, ever asserted either original sin, or justification by faith, in more strong, more clear and express terms, than Arminius has done. These two points, therefore, are to be set out of the question: In these both parties agree. In this respect, there is not a hair's breadth difference between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield."

"But there is an undeniable difference between the Calvinists and the Arminians, with regard to the three other questions. Here they divide; the former believe absolute, the latter only conditional, predestination. The Calvinists hold, (1.) God has absolutely decreed, from all eternity, to save such and such persons, and none else. The Arminians hold, God has decreed from all eternity, touching all that have the written word, 'He that believeth shall be saved: He that believeth not, shall be condemned:' And in order to this, 'Christ died for all, all that were dead in trespasses and sins' that is, for every child of Adam, since 'in Adam all died.'"

"The Calvinists hold, Secondly, that the saving grace of God is absolutely irresistible; that no man is any more able to resist it, than to resist the strike of lightning. The Arminians hold that although there may be some moments wherein the grace of God acts irresistibly, yet, in general, any man may resist, and that to his eternal ruin, the grace whereby it was the will of God he should never have been eternally saved."

"The Calvinists hold, Thirdly, that a true believer in Christ cannot possibly fall from grace. The Arminians hold, that a true believer may 'make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience;' that he may fall, not only foully, but finally, so as to perish for ever."

"Indeed, the two latter points, irresistible grace and infallible perseverance, are the natural consequence of the former, of the unconditional decree. For if God has eternally and absolutely decreed to save such and such persons, it follows, both that they cannot resist his saving grace, (else they might miss of salvation,) and that they cannot finally fall from that grace which they cannot resist. So that, in effect, the three questions come into one, "Is predestination absolute or conditional?" The Arminians believe, it is conditional; the Calvinists, that it is absolute." John Wesley

4. **Why I am an Arminian.**

- **Because I am a biblical literalist.** This means that I give the weight of presumption to the literal translation. I think that the straightforward reading of God's word is generally the best. Only when the text clearly indicates an

interpretation other than the literal are we free to consider the figurative. Hence, I choose to accept literally:

The divine invitations of Scripture as extended to all.

- “Come, all you who are thirsty.” Is. 55:1
- “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...” Mt. 11:28
- “Whosoever believeth in him...” John 3:16
- “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Rom. 10:13
- “Come to him, to that living stone...” 1 Pt. 2:4

The divine warnings of Scripture extended to all.

- “He who stands firm(endures) to the end will be saved.” Mt. 10:22
- “If we endure we will also reign with him.” 2 Tim. 2:12
- “If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” John 15:6
- “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall.” 1 Cor. 10:12
- “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” 1 Cor. 15:2
- “...we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.” 2 Cor. 6:1
- “But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith...” Col. 1:22f.
- “I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.” 1 Thess. 3:5
- “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” Heb. 10:26f.
- “...make your calling and election sure.” 1 Ptr. 1:10
- “He who overcomes...I will never blot out his name from the book of life...” Rev. 3:5

If Calvinism be true, the invitations and warnings appear to be insincere.

- **Because biblical assurance of salvation is based not upon a past act of belief only but also upon:**

- **One’s present belief in and love for Christ,**

- “The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”
- “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.” 1 John 5:13
- “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?” John 21:16

- **The exterior witness of obedience to his commands (good works),**

- “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.” John 14:23
- “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Rom. 10:9

“We ought therefore, brethren, carefully inquire concerning our salvation.
Otherwise the wicked one, having made his entrance by deceit,
may hurl us forth from our life.”
Barnabas, 1.138 (A.D. 70 – 130 ?)

“Let us then practice righteousness so that we may be saved unto the end.”
Clement of Rome 1.13 (A.D. 96)

“I hold further, that those of you who have confessed and known this man to be Christ,
yet who have gone back for some reason to the legal dispensation [i.e. the Mosaic Law]
and have denied that this man is Christ, and have not repented before death –
you will by no means be saved.”
Justin Martyr 1.218 (A.D. 160)

“Knowing that what preserves his life, namely obedience to God,
is good, he may diligently keep it with all earnestness...
Those who do not obey Him, being disinherited, by Him,
have ceased to be His sons.”
Irenaeus, 1.522 (A.D. 180)

“It is neither the faith, nor the love, nor the hope, nor the endurance of one day, rather,
‘he that endures to the end will be saved’.”
Clement of Alexandria 2.600 (A.D. 195)

“Being a believing man, if you seek to live as the Gentiles do,
the joys of the world remove you from the grace of Christ.”
Commodianus, 4.214 (A.D. 240)

“Certain ones of those [heretics] who hold different opinions misuse these passages.
They essentially destroy free will by introducing ruined natures incapable of salvation
and by introducing others as being saved in such a way that they cannot be lost.”
Origen, 4.308 (A.D. 245)

“As to one who again denies Christ, no special standing can be effective to him for salvation.
For anyone of us will hold it necessary that whatever is the last thing to be found in a man
in this respect, that is where he will be judged. All of those things that he has previously done
are wiped away and obliterated.”
Treatise on Re-Baptism 5.674 (A.D. 257)

“He who sins after his baptism, unless he repents and forsakes his sins,
will be condemned to Gehenna.”
Apostolic Constitutions 7.398 (Compiled, A.D. 390)

This is more than sufficient as a sampling of the ancient fathers. While their writings are not of the stature of Holy Scripture, they are, nevertheless, the understandings, which the persons had of the Scriptures who received them early in time.

- **Because the inception of determinate predestination appears to arise out of early Christian Gnosticism.** Similarity of a few tenets does not require a ‘guilt by association’, however, it causes suspicion in my own mind and should give pause for reflection to all. Listen to the words of world-renowned historian Henry Chadwick in *The Early Church*, pp. 35-38.

“The term Gnosticism is derived from the ordinary Greek word for knowledge (gnosis). The second century sects claimed to possess a special ‘knowledge’, which transcended the simple faith of the Church. But in fact their knowledge was not of a philosophical or intellectualist character, but rather a knowledge of the nature and destiny of man... What they claimed to know consisted of a myth about the creation of the world as the result of a pre-cosmic disaster which accounted for the present misery of man’s lot, and about the way in which the elect few may be redeemed... The content of the Gnostic gospel was an attempt to rouse the soul from its sleep-walking condition and to make it aware of the high destiny to which it is called... The influence of fatalistic ideas drawn from popular astrology and magic became fused with notions derived from Pauline language about predestination to produce a rigidly deterministic scheme. Redemption was from destiny, not from the consequences of responsible action, and was granted to a pre-determined elect in whom alone was the divine spark.”

I reiterate: Strict Calvinism is not Gnosticism, nor does it have Gnostic roots, nor is it guilty just because it shares several notions in common with Gnosticism. It is only noted that when the doctrine of a rigid predestination first surfaces in Christianity it is associated with the heretical teaching of Gnosticism.

- **Because of the biblical metaphors of apostasy. (salt, vine, names blotted out...)**
 - “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no long good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” (Mt. 5:13) The words “loses”, “anything”, and “thrown out” emphasize the possibility of, and the gravity of, the loss.
 - “If anyone does not remain in me...” (John 15:6) (Why this choice of words if it is not possible to cease to remain in Christ?) ... “he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” Again, the possibility of apostasy exists and the gravity of it is heavy indeed.
 - “He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.” (Rev. 3:5) There are at least nine references to this book and the following conclusions can be drawn from the Scriptures. (1) There is book of life variously referred to as “my book”(i.e. God’s), “the book”, “the book belonging to the Lamb” or the “Lamb’s book of life” (Gen. 32:33; Ps. 69:29; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12ff.; 21:27) (2) Names are written in this book from the creation of the world. (3) Names are blotted out of this book. (4) Only those whose names are in found in this book at the time of judgment are saved.

Conclusion:

I do not expect to convince everyone that Arminianism is more biblical than Calvinism, though I believe it to be so. I do hope that as a result of reading this paper you would search the Scriptures for yourself. Read the words of God. They are weightier than these words of men. If after reading the words of God you are still convinced of a position variant from mine, I pray that we can respectfully disagree and continue to do the will of our Father. We are, after all, brothers and sisters.