

Sermon Title: Calvinism and Arminianism: No, Thank You!
Scripture Text: Various

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-28-24

Well, if you happen to be here for the first time, I hope you will come again next Lord's Day. Next week, we are going to get back to what we *usually* do—teaching our way through God's Word a book, a chapter, a verse at a time; and we are going to dive into Acts 14 next Sunday, Lord willing. I have already started studying that; I can't wait to get back to it.

But I am going to do one more week away from our regular series. My normal "New Year Message" got pushed back a week because I wasn't ready for primetime after the ablation that I had—which has worked *outstandingly*, thank you. And then, my sermon became a series; and I said, "Okay, well, I'll take three weeks to do it. Well, I didn't finish it in three weeks—so, as I said, the part about advice on handling the presidential election year—that is in pamphlet form out in front.

And I am going to do one more thing. This is not part of the New Year series, but think of it as a bonus. There is an issue that has been lurking for *centuries*, and the questions have come to me *many* times in the last six months or so. I had just been talking with Scott Basolo about what was going to be taught in the coming year, and I said, "I think I would like to repeat that," and I got his "Atta boy"—notice, he is not *here* today, but he will be in full agreement with this because he has already heard the earlier version of it. I want to repeat something that I did twelve years ago, so let's dive in.

You can see the simple, kind, generous, loving title: "Calvinism and Arminianism: No, Thank You!" What do I mean by that?

Well, John Calvin—actually, *Jean* Calvin; he was French—he was a French pastor, theologian, and reformer. He carried out most of his ministry in Geneva, Switzerland; and the story of his ministry is *fascinating* reading.

In 1536—now, get the timeframe: Luther nailed his "95 Theses" to the door of the church in Wittenberg in 1517, so, 20 years into the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin wrote his famous book on theology titled "Institutes of the Christian Religion"; that was 1536. Then, just before his death in 1564, he published a greatly expanded version of the *Institutes* which still stands as one of the most significant theology works of all time.

Now, would you believe that in order to teach his doctrine as effectively as possible, Calvin came up with the ingenious plan to produce a simple acronym that would summarize the essential elements of the Gospel, and especially the essential elements of the Doctrine of Salvation—and particularly, to help teach it to *children*. The acronym that Calvin produced was "TULIP"—and that helps people remember the famous "Five Points of Calvinism."

Now, a lot of people do not realize that that is how the acronym "TULIP" began. The reason is: *That is not where it began!* That is *not* where it came from! *I* made that up because *I* knew that would sound plausible to a whole lot of people. And I want you to realize that *that* is *not* the source of this. It *is not* for teaching the doctrine to children, and it is *ludicrous* to say that it came from Calvin because he wrote the "Institutes of the Christian Religion" in *Latin*, and then his final version was published in both Latin and

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Calvin's native tongue of French—and have you ever tried to translate an acronym from one language into another? You know, my initials in Russian are "DDX"—*of course*, that's what [stands for] James Joseph Harris...*It doesn't work* to go from one language to another! But that *ridiculous* explanation makes as much sense as what *most* people actually do understand about "Calvinism" and "Arminianism."

The origin of "TULIP" as we know it goes back *only* to the early *twentieth century* in English—*400 years* after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation! *Nowhere* in the writings of John Calvin can you find a five-point summary of his understanding of the biblical Doctrine of Salvation. The "Five Points" did not originate with Calvin. They did not originate in Geneva. It was among some of the Reformed Church theologians in the Netherlands—Dutch theologians who were the source of this.

And among those theologians in the Netherlands was a man named Jacobus Arminius. He died in 1609—so, keep the chronology here: Reformation begins in 1517; "Institutes of the Christian Religion" written in 1536, revised in 1564. Jacobus Arminius died in 1609. In 1610—I researched: that was *after* he was dead—some of the *followers* of Arminius produced what is known as "The Five Points of Remonstrance."

Now, I bet you have gone *all week long* and never once did the word "remonstrance" tumble out of your mouth. What does "remonstrance" mean? It means "rejection." That was five points at which this little circle of Dutch theologians *rejected* the doctrinal statements that had become most widely understood among the Reformers in Europe.

And by the way: If you were to translate the "Points of Remonstrance" the way that they were logically arranged and originally published, even if you *did* put it in English, the order would not be "TULIP," it would be "ULTIP"—but *that* doesn't sound as catchy. And *especially* if you are trying to stick a finger in the eye of a bunch of Dutch people, it is more effective to insult their tulips.

Now, the ensuing debates—they went on for a little while. In 1610, that was published. And finally, they had a big meeting of theologians from all over Europe. They met in the city of Dordrecht in the Netherlands—so they went, and it was a home game for the followers of Arminius. And this meeting was called "The Synod of Dort." If you want to insult somebody for their theology, just call them a "Dort," and you will remember that.

"The Five Points of Remonstrance" were refuted by the Synod of Dort, and they wrote a summary statement. It was *not* five letters, it was *not* five words, not five paragraphs—it was an 18-page document called "The Canons of Dort," which went in depth into refuting the five points of rejection that started this whole argument. And "The Canons of Dort" is still one of the most widely-accepted documents among Reformed believers.

Now remember, all this began a year after Jacobus Arminius died, and *decades* after John Calvin died—he had been dead for 40-plus years before this hit the fan. Arminius *never heard* of "Arminianism"—let alone did he start it. Calvin *never heard* of "Calvinism"—let alone did he start it. And my friend, I want to let you know: God will *never* ask you if you are a Calvinist or an Arminian.

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Today, my goal is to help fellow Christians remain faithful to the Word of God *without* getting swept aside into usually fruitless arguments and endless discussions about overworked, emotionally-charged words. Instead, we need to learn to confine our discussions to *God's intended meaning* of each passage of His Word in its context (see Is. 8:20; Matt. 4:4; 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3).

There are good people on both sides who have debated these two systems since 1610. Now,. I never met Jacobus Arminius, I never met John Calvin, but I would daresay that if we were to sit down at a table with them today, and you would say, "I am afraid I am on my way to Hell—how can I be rescued?"—you would get *the same answer* from both of them (e.g., Jn. 1:12; 6:40; Acts 16:31). This is an *intramural* debate between people who believe the Gospel.

There is a background that brought *me* to the point of having the nerve to actually record this and have it on the Internet. It has been there for twelve years, and it has been kind of useful. Some people have left Heritage Bible Church because of it. Some people have *never come* to Heritage Bible Church because they heard that first, and that is sad. But here is the background: For all 20 years of Heritage Bible Church, and for the last 22 years, I have been involved with ministering to and alongside Russian Christians. And somehow, through the course of their time prior to the time of communism—and then it kind of became solidified during communism—they were taught to *fear* Calvinism and to *distrust* American Christians who might come to Russia and try to "subvert" their theology. That is the situation into which I was asked to come and prepare documents and teach and help train other pastors to teach Russian pastors and church planters.

So I had to figure out how to *address* things *without* getting sucked into a vortex or an argument, how to keep things on track (see Job 15:3; 1 Tim. 1:4-6; 6:4, 20; 2 Tim. 2:14, 23; Titus 3:9). And so I worked out some ways to work through it in the class times; and *eventually*, on about my seventh or eighth trip to Tambov, I was teaching the Doctrine of Salvation, and I came up with this little presentation, and I talked about it a little bit when I got home; and finally, someone persuaded me: "Well, you *really* ought to make that into a sermon!" Well, it's kind of more like a *lesson* than a sermon, but—get over it; I'll be back to Acts next week. So *that* led to the 2011 version of this sermon. And this question kind of seems to come in waves, and the wave has crested recently; and probably no less than 20 times in the last six months, somebody has asked me where we stand, or where *I* stand on this question. So, I am going to bring it to you again today.

Now remember, the context is: I am dealing with people who *thought* they were "Arminians"—oh, they were *terrible* at Arminianism. They had been taught to *hate* "Calvinism"—and they had no idea what "Calvinism" was. And I am trying to teach God's Word *without* letting the slings and arrows do any damage. So, I came up with this rather meant-to-be-whimsical outline:

Number 1: Don't Call Me "Calvinist"
Number 2: Don't Call Me "Arminian"

And as time permits, we will say a couple of words about God's Sovereignty and Man's Choice.

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So, the backbone of this alleged sermon is basically two lists.

Let's start with the list: Why I Don't Want To Be Called "Calvinist"

Now, let's make full disclosure here: Since I am affiliated with ministries that are historically much more "Calvinistic" than "Arminian," I feel like I am more qualified to critique *my* side of the debate—*our* side of the debate.

And I *also* want to make it clear: If we were ever to show up at the gates of Heaven—I don't think that is *quite* how it works—but if we find out there is *one* gate, but there are *two* lines leading to the entrance of the gate, you *must* choose one of those two lines, and one says "Calvinists Here" and the other says "Arminians Here"—if I go to the "Arminian" line, they are going to kick me out. So, I am *more* Calvinistic than Arminian; but I am not going to come to the gates of Heaven, and they say, "Why should I let you in?" and I say, "John Calvin said 'TULIP!'" No, that's not going to work.

So for 20-plus years, I have been working very closely with *marvelous* servants of the Lord in Russia who come from a background openly hostile to Calvinism—but I have been able to help them understand that what they oppose is actually quite a *caricature* of Calvinism.

So when we study together, I *always* issue this ground rule, and you have probably heard me do it here. My ground rule is: We will discuss the exegesis of *any* passage in the Bible, but we *will not* debate theological sound bites. And so far, it has worked quite well, and it eventually led to my list.

Okay, buckle up—here we go: Why I Don't Want To Be Called "Calvinist":

Number 1: Most people don't really know what "Calvinism" means. They may *think* they know, but most don't. One of those pastors from that sort of allegedly Arminian background once told me why he opposed Calvinism. He said, "Calvinism is *very bad!* It means that you believe that you can receive Christ, and then live any way you want!" And I said, "You know, I don't know one Calvinist on the planet who believes that! That is a *caricature* of the truth, and twisting it into an error." (see Deut. 29:19-20; Jer. 7:8-10; Matt. 7:21; Rom. 6:1-2, 15; Jas. 2:26; 1 Jn. 2:4; Rev. 14:12)

Number 2: "Calvinism" misrepresents some of the beliefs of John Calvin. As I said: John Calvin never came up with "five points" of Bible doctrine. *Some* of his *followers*—and actually, it was much *broader* than just the followers of Calvin in Geneva; all of the collective decision of the Reformed theologians of Europe was to *reject* the five points of rejection—to *refute* the "Five Points of Remonstrance." And those who have labeled the famous "Five Points" as "Calvinism"—they state things *much more strongly* than Calvin did. Now, it is a point of debate—and *legitimate* debate, and I hope friendly and good-hearted debate—but I think it is pretty clear: Calvin did not hold to the "Five Points" for which he is blamed—not all five of them. And you can debate that, but we will get to Heaven one way or the other.

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Number 3: The arrogance of many Calvinists is disgusting (see Ps. 57:4; Prov. 12:18; Ecc. 10:12; Eph. 4:15, 29; Jas. 3:8-10). There has been kind of a renewal of interest in Reformed Theology in America over the last 20 or 30 years; and among that, there was a movement that was called "Young, Restless, and Reformed"—so, they *didn't want anything to do with the old guys*; they were *restless*: "There is something *wrong*; we have to *stir the pot* and make this happen, and we are *intensely Reformed!*"—you have to be a "Five-Pointer." And so, some of them have presented Calvinism with no patience, with no compassion, with no grace toward those who have not agreed with them (see Phil. 4:5; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; Titus 3:2-3)—and that is interesting, because they are fond of calling the Five Points of Calvinism "The Doctrines of *Grace*." "These are the Doctrines of God's *Grace*—and you better believe them!" It's an incongruity.

Number 4: If you want to judge me on five points of doctrine, you are *robbing me* of at least 95 more! Now, the great doctrines of Christianity are rich. The issues *raised* by the Five Points of Calvinism are *very* significant issues that are *very much* anchored in God's Word, but you can *never* fully grasp the depth of all of doctrine in one lifetime (Job 5:9; 9:10; 26:14; Is. 55:8-9; Eph. 3:8, 19; Rom. 11:33). And how *silly* is it to believe that five points summarize *everything* important to us! So, don't call them "The Doctrines of Grace" and then be arrogant and act like that is the beginning and end of any discussion.

Number 5: Many Calvinists Use "Calvinism" as a Hermeneutic. "Hermeneutics" is the science and the art of Bible interpretation: the principles for interpreting the Bible. And some use Calvinism like a magic decoder ring: Look at *any* passage—you look at it through the lens of Calvinism, and you *know* before you study the passage that it is going to reinforce your belief in these five points. That is using it as a hermeneutic, where you *interpret* a passage based upon a *conclusion* you have already drawn that you *import into* that passage. I throw a flag on that every time I see it. It is dangerous and it is not honest, and it happens in a *lot* of places—not *just* in this debate.

Number 6: Now, let's get a little more specific about things: Another reason I don't want to be called a Calvinist is: First John 2:2 *means what it says*. First John 2:2 says: "And He Himself"—Christ—"is the propitiation for our sins; and *not for ours only*, but *also for those of the whole world*." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted). That's a *straightforward*, simple, present-tense declarative sentence. It means what it says (cf. Is. 53:6; Jn. 1:29; 6:51; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 19; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 1 Jn. 4:14). But a full-blown "Five Pointer" will explain to you that that verse teaches that Jesus *actually is* "the propitiation" *only* for the sins of some—even though that is *exactly the opposite* of what the words say! *That's a problem!* And that is on *my* side of the fence!

Number 7: Another one—First Timothy 4:10 means what it says. What does it say? "We have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." So, who was the Savior for? "All men" (cf. Jn. 3:16; 6:51)—and there is something *special* about "believers"! They are the ones among "all men" who "believe" (Jn. 1:12; 3:18, 36; 6:40; 8:24). Most Calvinists explain that verse *as if* it teaches that Jesus is *not* "the Savior of all men"; and they say, "Well, He kind of saves unbelievers until they make it to Hell—keeps them alive." That's *ridiculous!* That is *not* what the passage actually says (cf. Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5-6).

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Number 8: Here is another verse you will be familiar with. I don't want to be called a Calvinist because John 3:16 means what it says: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Most Calvinists will explain to you that if you *really* understand things, God *did not* send His Son so that "the world" could be "saved" (contra Is. 49:6; Jn. 1:29; 3:17; 6:33, 51; 12:47; 17:21, 23; 18:20; Rom. 11:12, 15; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Jn. 4:14). Most Calvinists believe God *does not* "love" everyone in "the world" equally, even though the words say exactly the opposite (cf. Ezek. 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; Titus 3:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). And Calvinists love to take the word "world," and they will give it about three or four *different* meanings, and pluck them out as they want to and plug them in, in different verses. I think the Holy Spirit was not that obtuse about the words that He chose.

Number 9: I tried to think, "How can I say this in a way that will let me be a little whimsical with my Russian brothers?" so, pardon me if this sounds harsh. Many Calvinists snuff out man's will under God's sovereignty. Now, God *is* sovereign, and His will is going to be accomplished on Earth (Job 42:2; Ps. 33:11; 103:19; 119:91; 135:6; Prov. 19:21; Is. 55:10-11; Lam. 3:37; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11b). Understanding the will of God really is a very important thing. I mean, you have no basis upon which to not be anxious unless God is sovereign! If He is not in control, you *ought* to be scared, you *ought* to be anxious! He *is* in control.

But, while He *is* in control, *you* have the opportunity, the invitation, and the responsibility to *make decisions* which affect your eternal destiny (e.g., Ps. 2:12; 7:12; Prov. 28:13; Is. 55:6-7; Jn. 1:12; 3:18, 36; 5:40; 8:24; Acts 3:19; Eph. 1:13; 2 Thess. 1:8; 2:10, 12). We *cannot deny* man's responsibility! And we *dare not say* one of the things that has been brought up to me: "Well, if you are a Calvinist, then you believe that some people *cannot be saved!*" And I want to say, "Would you please bring to me a person who has *tried* to be saved, and couldn't? Would you bring me someone who says, 'I want to receive the "free gift" of "eternal life in Christ" (Rom. 6:23), and *I can't!*' (see Rom. 3:11; 1 Cor. 2:14) Would you show me *one verse* that says God created some people, and *doesn't* want them to be saved?" Calvinists kind of snuff out the human-responsibility side of that, under God's sovereignty. But Second Peter 3:9 says: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, *not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*" (cf. Ezek. 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4). What *is* God's will about man's salvation? He doesn't want anybody to perish! Now then, you have to sort out, "Well, *some* will perish." Alright—God is sovereign; we will work that through.

Number 10: The Bible does not teach "double predestination." Now, "predestination"—fancy word. "Predestination and Election"—the teaching that "before the foundation of the world," God "chose" people to be saved (Eph. 1:4). The Bible *teaches* that; it *says* it (e.g., Acts 13:48; Rom. 9:23; Gal. 1:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). But *nowhere* does the Bible teach that God *specialy created* individuals *for the purpose* of condemning them to "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10; see Ps. 9:16; Prov. 14:32; Ecc. 7:29; Is. 3:11; Matt. 25:41b; Rom. 2:5). And people say, "Well, you can't teach one without the other! If there are ten pairs of socks in your drawer you opened it this morning and you pulled out *one*, you chose that one and you *rejected* the other nine!" Well, that is a terrible analogy, and that is not what the Bible actually says.

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Number 11: A bit repetitive, but this is one where I don't believe you can find this in Calvin's teachings. The Bible does not teach "Limited Atonement"—that is the idea that Christ specifically came to make atonement *only* for the sins of some people, and *not* for anybody else. Now, you believe in a *form* of "Limited Atonement" unless you believe that everybody is going to Heaven, right? Not *everybody* is going to be in Heaven, so the atonement *will not* be applied to *everybody* (e.g., Jn. 1:12; 8:24; Acts 10:43; Rom. 1:16; 2 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 2:3; 10:39a; 12:25; 1 Pet. 2:7)—but that is different than saying Christ did not die for the sins of anybody except this small minority that will be saved (contra Jn. 6:51; 1 Tim. 2:6; 4:10; Heb. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:2). Again—great worthy discussions there, but I don't think Calvin taught that.

Number 12: Man *chooses* to believe or to reject Christ. It is a legitimate choice. It is a real decision. *Many* passages in the Bible call people to make the choice to believe in Christ (e.g., Mk. 1:15; Jn. 9:35-38; 12:36; Acts 16:31; 28:24; Gal. 2:16; 1 Jn. 3:23), and they warn against *rejecting* Him (e.g., Jn. 3:18, 36; 12:48; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2:12; Heb. 2:3; 12:25; 4:1-3; 1 Jn. 5:10). Those are *legitimate* invitations to make *legitimate* choices that have eternal consequences, and men and women *are* responsible for their choices. You have heard us often quote Second Corinthians Chapter 5, Verse 20— "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; *we beg you* on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." Now, um, I guess Paul was not a Calvinist! What is he doing *begging* people to "be reconciled to God" if God created them to send them to Hell? There is a great disconnect there.

Finally, Number 13: It is my humble belief that Calvin would be appalled by people using his *name* as a heading on theology (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12-13; 3:4-7). John Calvin devoted his life to great theology, to preaching through God's Word verse by verse, book by book; and as a humble man of God, I believe John Calvin would *hate* to hear people use his name as the title for their doctrine. And frankly, I think "Calvinism," as it is portrayed, *depreciates* the fullness of the ministry of John Calvin. There is *so much more!* Go read his commentary on some passage—it is profound.

Okay. I want to say: Don't Call Me "Calvinist"
I *also* want to say: Don't Call Me "Arminian"

Why I don't want to be called "Arminian" (and many of these parallel the other side of it):

Number 1: Most people don't really know what "Arminianism" means. And so, when you use the term—and people have them *loaded* with emotional baggage and not understanding anything about church history—it is a problem. Most people know even *less* about Jacobus Arminius than they know about John Calvin. And when Arminius' followers *rejected* the biblical doctrine of individual election to salvation, it touched off a big debate in the Dutch Church. But after Arminius' death, his *followers* were the ones who threw down the gauntlet: "Five Articles of Remonstrance"—"We reject these five things, Mister Luther, Mister Calvin, Mister Zwingli, and all the others!" And that was the beginning of the discussion which led to the 1618 Synod of Dort in which the "Five Points" were the *responses* to the "Five Points of *Rejection*." Keep that in mind. Most people don't really know that that is what Arminianism is all about.

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Number 2: I'll say what I said a minute ago: To judge me on five points of doctrine is to rob me of at least 95 more.

Number 3: Many Arminians use "Arminianism" as a hermeneutic—as their filter through which they interpret the Bible. Some of my most *frustrating* conversations about the Bible have been with Arminian brothers who try to explain that passages like John 10:28—"no one will snatch them out of My hand"—how they *don't really mean* that. And I have actually had somebody say, "Well, yeah, nobody can '*snatch*' you out of God's hand, but you can jump!" (contra Jer. 32:40; 1 Cor. 1:8; Jude 24) What verse was *that*? I don't see that one!

Anytime we allow one text to overrule another, instead of saying, "This says this; this says this. *Together*, what do they say? How do they harmonize? How do they fit together?" (cf. Ps. 119:128, 161, 160; Matt. 4:4; 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16)

Alright, I will get specific on *this* side of the ledger as well:

Number 4: Don't call me "Arminian" because Ephesians 1:4-5 means what it says. What does it say? "Just as He *chose us* in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." And by the way: That is the beginning of a sentence that goes on for *most of the page* in your Bible—a *fantastic* statement of doctrine. That passage teaches that "before the foundation of the world" God "*chose*" *each believer* to be "adopted" as His child (e.g., Jn. 1:13; 6:37, 39, 44-45, 65; 15:16; 17:2; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:29-30; 9:15-16, 23; Gal. 1:15-16; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Jas. 2:5; Rev. 13:8; 17:8, 14). And by the way: The Greek grammar means God "*chose for Himself, by His will*" (cf. Jn. 15:19b).

That *does not negate* man's responsibility to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but it *does* mean: God chose who will believe (cf. Deut. 29:4; 30:6; Jer. 24:7; 31:3; Matt. 11:27; 13:11; Jn. 6:37, 44-45, 65; Acts 3:16; 13:48; 16:14; 18:27; 1 Cor. 2:14; 12:3b; Eph. 2:5, 8; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:10, 25; Jas. 1:18; 2 Pet. 1:1)—and an Arminian "remonstrates" against that, doesn't believe it.

Number 5: Second Thessalonians 2:13 means what it says. That verse says: "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because *God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation* through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." It is a *simple* declarative statement! "God"—that is the subject; "has chosen"—that is the verb; "you"—the direct object. Why? "for salvation." That is *not a complicated sentence*! And it means: "God has chosen you...for salvation." It does not mean: "God chose to *invite* you."

Now, does He invite? Yes—in the universal call to salvation (e.g., Is. 45:22; 55:1; Matt. 11:28; Jn. 7:37; Acts 17:30; Rev. 22:17). But it says: If you have believed, it is because God chose you! (Jn. 6:37, 44-45, 65) Didn't you have a choice? Yes, you had a choice—but it was *God's* choice "before the foundation of the world" (cf. Gal. 1:15-16).

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Number 6: I lumped some things together that I have taught in Russia and elsewhere: First Peter 1:1-5 means what it says: ["Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."] *That one* majors on the issue of the security of salvation—or "Perseverance of the Saints" (Rev. 14:12) or "Preservation of the Saints" (Ps. 34:19; 37:24, 28; Jer. 32:40; Lk. 22:31-32; Jn. 5:24; 6:39, 44b; 10:27-29; Rom. 8:30-39; 1 Cor. 1:8; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Phil. 1:6; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 7:25; Jude 24). And if you teach that it is possible to lose salvation, that contradicts with Peter's words there—God's Word *through* Peter (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21)—six ways (cf. Rom. 8:30; Heb. 3:14; 10:39; 1 Jn. 2:19). I have a little one-page document on that, if you ever want to ask me for it.

Number 7: John 10:28 means what it says; I alluded to this. What does John 10:28 say? In the words of Jesus: "And I give eternal life to them, and *they will never perish*; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." If a person who is saved could *ever* again become lost, Jesus didn't know that—or He *lied* here! "Eternal" *cannot be* "temporary"! There is *no such thing* as "temporary eternal life"! "Never perish" *cannot mean* "except sometimes, some of them perish" (cf. Jn. 5:24; Heb. 10:14). The words are *clear*, and the passage needs to be harmonized with other passages without allowing *one* to negate another.

Number 8 is the mirror image of another thing that I said on the other side: Many Arminians snuff out God's *sovereignty* under man's will. We *cannot deny* that God is sovereign, including the crystal-clear statements of the Bible that He is sovereign in choosing who will be saved, without getting ourselves into a problem.

The standard Arminian viewpoint is: "Foreknowledge, predestination, election"—it means God, because He is outside of time, looked into time, He looked into the future, He saw who was going to believe in Him, so He chose them. That *does not mean* "God chose for Himself before the foundation of the world"—it means *the opposite* of that! *That* means eternal destiny is *one hundred percent* the decision of man, and God has to *adapt* to the decisions of *man*! That is *not* the God of the Bible (cf. Acts 13:48; 16:14; Acts 18:27; Rom. 11:35; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; 1 Jn. 4:19). If you are going to say that *that* is the definition of "foreknowledge" about salvation, you really have a problem when you get to First Peter Chapter 1, Verse 20. You might want to look that up; it says that by the "foreknowledge" of God, Christ is the Savior. Are you really telling me that God peaked through the curtains of time and said [with surprise]: "Oh! It's *Jesus*! I'll pick *Him*!" You cannot have the meaning of the word *change* on the same page of your Bible, from one verse to a little farther down the page (1 Pet. 1:2, 20; cf. Acts 2:23). That is a *big* one. And by the way: It is just as wrong on the other side, when you act as if the decisions of people don't matter.

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Number 9: This one is a little bit more esoteric, but: Arminianism leads to "Open Theism." "Open Theism" is the modern heresy that God is learning as He goes; God is *adapting* as He goes (contra Ps. 139:4, 16; 147:5; Is. 40:28; 42:9; 46:10; Jn. 13:19; 16:30; 21:17; Heb. 4:13; Rev. 17:8). I won't go into a lot of detail, but just suffice it to say: That is the fruit that springs from the seed of unbridled Arminianism.

Number 10: "Arminianism" agrees with "Pelagianism" or "Semi-Pelagianism." Even if you have driven a semi this week, I'll bet you never said "Pelagianism"! What is that? "Pelagianism" is the belief that mankind was *not* directly affected by the sin of Adam. You have no guilt in Adam; you are guilty *only* of your own individual sins. It is, frankly, the Roman Catholic view. And when they say "Pelagianism" or "Semi-Pelagianism," there is a way to waffle on what you mean by that; but either way, it is the *denial* of First Corinthians 15:22—"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." (see also Rom. 5:12; cf. Gen. 8:21; Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13)

Number 11: Arminianism denies "Total Depravity." "Total Depravity"—that's the "T" of "TULIP." It is the theological shorthand for the belief that the effects of sin affect *every part* of a person; that in relation to God, there is no "good" inherent within the sinner (Rom. 7:18a; cf. Rom. 3:10-18, 23; 8:5-8), and there is nothing within a sinner that can turn him to God (1 Cor. 2:14; cf. Jn. 3:3, 5; 6:44, 65; 1 Cor. 12:3b). Arminianism holds that man can, indeed, turn to God purely by his own will—even though the *Bible* says you can't, unless you are "made alive" in Christ (Eph. 2:5; cf. Jer. 24:7; Jn. 6:63; Acts 16:14; 2 Tim. 2:25; Titus 3:5). When they started out, "Well, why did they come up with the 'T' version?" Well, because the Remonstrators said, "We don't believe that! We reject that!"

Number 12—pretty obvious: God chooses who will be saved. There are a lot of passages, more than the ones I have just quoted, that say God chooses who will be saved (e.g., Ex. 33:19; Matt. 11:25-27; 13:11; Jn. 1:13; 6:37, 44-45, 65; 8:47; 10:26-27; 17:2; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:29-30; 9:15-16; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2:10, 25; Jas. 1:18; 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Rev. 13:8; 17:8, 14). And Arminians deny that those passages mean what they say.

Now, if you *choose* to reject the Doctrine of Total Depravity, or if you *choose* to reject the Doctrine of Election, perhaps you can reserve a seat next to Arminius' followers in Heaven. You can say, "I don't like that doctrine!" (see Jn. 6:65-66) You can say, "I think that doctrine is unfair!" (see Ezek. 33:17) You can say, "I don't want to hear that doctrine preached!" (see Lk. 4:25-29) But you *cannot* say, and be honest, "That is not what the Bible says." And that is a *huge* problem with Arminianism (see 1 Thess. 4:8).

And then, finally, Number 13: I really believe that Jacobus Arminius would be *appalled* to have his name associated with a theological fight (cf. 1 Cor. 3:4-7). He *never* set out to attach his name to a set of doctrines, *any more* than did John Calvin. As a child of God seeking to understand God's Word, I am confident *both* those guys would *hate* to have their names attached to these theological debates. Don't forget: It was the *followers* of Arminius *after his death* who attached his name to those beliefs. It was people who interpreted the 18 pages of the Canons of Dort to say this is summarized in this five-point refutation of the five points of rejection, and they have stuck Calvin's name on it.

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Now, in light of the emotionally-charged arguments that make discussing Arminianism versus Calvinism almost always unfruitful—oh, and by the way: *Don't do this online!* Another whole subject. See everything in my pamphlet about dealing with a presidential election. *Don't do it online!* I suggest that since these labels are emotionally charged and almost always unfruitful, let's call each other what the Bible actually calls us. Please accept my invitation. We will discuss *any* passage of the Bible and what it means, and we will discuss how to harmonize it with all the others. But *stay away* from the attempts to beat one another into submission under the weight of manmade theological systems! (see Mk. 9:50b; 2 Cor. 10:4; Phil. 2:3; 1 Tim. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; Titus 1:7; Jas. 1:19-20).

Go ahead—call me anything that the Bible does: "Christian" (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). "Christian" was a *pejorative* name—"those little Christs!" But we know what it means. Call me a "Christian"; call me a "disciple"—a follower of Christ (Matt. 28:19-20); call me a "believer"—I trust in Him (Gal. 3:9; 1 Pet. 1:21); call me a "saint"—made holy in Him (1 Cor. 1:2); call me a "brother"—we are [part of] the family of God (Rom. 12:10). By my function, you can call me "pastor"—that is perfectly fine (Eph. 4:11). Please *do not* call me "reverend"! As soon as I got ordained, I looked that up and said, "Nope! Don't want to be called by that one!"—"one to be revered." No, no, no, no! Call me "pastor" if you want. And you know, "Jim" works just fine. And there are other names that are legitimate—and other names that I have been called as well.

Now: God's Sovereignty and Man's Choice (see Gen. 50:20; Pr. 16:1, 9; 20:24; 21:1; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28)

We are pretty much out of time, but I just want to say a couple of things:

I am not even a *little bit* interested in finding "middle ground" between Calvinism and Arminianism. There *isn't* "middle ground"! The Reformers were pretty clear what they taught. The Remonstrators said, "We *reject* some of the things you taught." What is the "middle ground"? You can't say, "Two football teams are playing today. I like this one, you like that one—let's find some middle ground! You know, if this team plays this team, let's have Team #3 win this game!" You can't do that. I am not interested in helping people to compromise or to pick and choose until they come up with *their own* system that they really like. I just want to help you understand God's Word in its context, and fitted together with all the others (Acts 20:20, 27; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2).

And one of the things that I came up with that I said in Russia that I want to say to you: I *refuse* to defend *any* theological statement that requires me to explain why *any* verse of the Bible *does not mean* what it says. And that is a problem on *both sides* of the "Calvinism versus Arminianism" debate.

Now, what about God's Sovereignty and Man's Choice? Man is totally in control. I mean, *God* is totally in control.

Man is completely responsible. You *are* legitimately invited to "be saved" (Acts 2:40). You know, Joshua said: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Jos. 24:15, NKJV). Well, that's legitimate. But, *God* is in charge! *Both* of those are true.

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Calvinists cross the line when they overrule passages that teach man's choices and responsibilities. Arminians cross the line when they overrule the clear statements about Election and Predestination and Foreknowledge. *Both of them* cross a line when they are arrogant or self-righteous or disrespectful *in the name of* defending what the Bible teaches. And *both* cross a line if they call into question the salvation of people on the other side of this debate, *just because* they are on the other side of this debate (see Rom. 14:4, 10, 19).

Well, that's plenty. You know, God sovereignly determined that you would hear this sermon today? (Prov. 20:24) Alright, that's *a little bit* tongue-in-cheek, but *He did!* Now I have to ask you: He is calling you to be faithful to His Word (Is. 8:20; 2 Tim. 2:15), and to graciously and tenaciously proclaim the Gospel (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:27; 2 Tim. 2:24). What are you going to do with it?

And let's pray:

Father, how we do thank You for Your Word, for its clarity. Indeed, we thank You for its depth; we thank You for its complexity, and that we can continue always to feast our souls on Your Word, and be fed every time. Father, help us to not contribute to "fruitless discussions," and certainly to not discuss the loftiness of theology in a carnal manner. Have Your way with us to that end. Use us for Your glory. Help us to be known for the Gospel, not for debating. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.