



The Question, "What Is An Arminian?" Answered by a Lover of Free Grace

by John Wesley

1. To say, "This man is an Arminian," has the same effect on many hearers, as to say, "This is a mad dog." It puts them into a fright at once: They run away from him with all speed and diligence; and will hardly stop, unless it be to throw a stone at the dreadful and mischievous animal.
2. The more unintelligible the word is, the better it answers the purpose. Those on whom it is fixed know not what to do: Not understanding what it means, they cannot tell what defence to make, or how to clear themselves from the charge. And it is not easy to remove the prejudice which others have imbibed, who know no more of it, than that it is "something very bad," if not "all that is bad!"
3. To clear the meaning, therefore, of this ambiguous term, may be of use to many: To those who so freely pin this name upon others, that they may not say what they do not understand; to those that hear them, that they may be no longer abused by men saying they know not what; and to those upon whom the name is fixed, that they may know how to answer for themselves.
4. It may be necessary to observe, First, that many confound Arminians with Arians. But this is entirely a different thing; the one has no resemblance to the other. An Arian is one who denies the Godhead of Christ; we scarce need say, the supreme, eternal Godhead; because there can be no God but the supreme, eternal God, unless we will make two Gods, a great God and a little one. Now, none have ever more firmly believed, or more strongly asserted, the Godhead of Christ, than many of the (so called) Arminians have done; yea, and do at this day. Arminianism therefore (whatever it be) is totally different from Arianism.
5. The rise of the word was this: JAMES HARMENS, in Latin, Jacobes Arminius, was first one of the Ministers of Amsterdam, and afterwards Professor of Divinity at Leyden. He was educated at Geneva; but in the year 1591 began to doubt of the principles which he had till then received. And being more and more convinced that they were wrong, when he was vested with the Professorship, he publicly taught what he believed the truth, till, in the year 1609, he died in peace. But a few years after his death, some zealous men with the Prince of Orange at their head, furiously assaulted all that held what were called his opinions; and having procured them to be solemnly condemned, in the famous Synod of Dort, (not so numerous or learned, but full as impartial, as the Council or Synod of Trent,) some were put to death, some banished, some imprisoned for life, all turned out of their employments, and made incapable of holding any office, either in Church or State.
6. The errors charged upon these (usually termed Arminians) by their opponents, are five: (1.) That they deny original sin; (2.) That they deny justification by faith; (3.) That they deny absolute predestination; (4.) That they deny the grace of God to be irresistible; and, (5.) 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.

7. But there is an undeniable difference between the Calvinists and 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 no others; and that Christ died for these, 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."

8. 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 stroke 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 have been eternally saved.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. Away, then, with all ambiguity! Away with all expressions which only puzzle the cause! Let honest men speak out, and not play with hard words which they do not understand. And how can any man know what Arminius held, who has never read one page of his writings? Let no man bawl against Arminians, till he knows what the term means; and then he will know that Arminians and Calvinists are just upon a level. And Arminians have as much right to be angry at Calvinists, as Calvinists have to be angry at Arminians. John Calvin was a pious, learned, sensible man; and so was James Harmens. Many Calvinists are pious, learned, sensible men; and so are many Arminians. Only the former hold absolute predestination; the latter, conditional.

12. One word more: Is it not the duty of every Arminian Preacher, First, never, in public or in private, to use the word Calvinist as a term of reproach; seeing it is neither better nor worse than calling names? -- a practice no more consistent with good sense or good manners, than it is with Christianity. Secondly. To do all that in him lies to prevent his hearers from doing it, by showing them the sin and folly of it? And is it not equally the duty of every Calvinist Preacher, First, never in public or in private, in preaching or in conversation, to use the word Arminian as a term of reproach? Secondly. To do all that in him lies to prevent his hearers from doing it, by showing them the sin and folly thereof; and that the more earnestly and diligently, if they have been accustomed so to do? perhaps encouraged therein by his own example!

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