

PRESBYTERIANISM

The Sovereignty and Grace of God

WHO ARE YOU?

- What descriptors would you use to define your identity?
- Reformed Christianity is rooted in the 16th century, when Protestant reformers protested against the corrupt teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic church
- The Reformed tradition identifies with the life and work of John Calvin and the three basic doctrines of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, and *Sola Fides*
- Reformed doctrinal beliefs are summarised in the 17th century Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms

WHO ARE YOU?

- Presbyterianism is a subset of the Reformed tradition and whose identity is shaped by our history, beliefs, and practices
- The term “Presbyterian” refers to a Greek term in the NT, *presbuteros*, meaning “elder”
- The Presbyterian Church governing body is based on a system of elders, teaching and ruling elders or ministers, who are ordained and responsible for the discipline, nurture and mission of the congregation
- Is the evangelical church today in need of reformation?

THE HEART OF REFORMED BELIEF

- At the heart of Reformed Theology is belief in **God's sovereignty** and **human dependence**
- We believe the Scriptures teach that God is in complete and absolute control of his creation
- “To put it simply, when we talk about God as sovereign, we mean that God is King” (Lucas 2006, 15)
- Therefore, we depend on him for all we have and are

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND CONTROL

- Evil within the mystery of God's divine sovereignty (Gen 50:19-20; Isa 10:5-16; Acts 4:27-28)
- ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND CONTROL

- “Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! ⁶ I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. ⁷ But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in mind; his purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations. ⁸ ‘Are not my commanders all kings?’ he says. ⁹ ‘Has not Kalno fared like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad, and Samaria like Damascus? ¹⁰ As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols, kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria—¹¹ shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols?’” ¹² When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, “I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes” (Isa 10:5-12)

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND CONTROL

- ²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen (Acts 4:27-28)

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND CONTROL

- Divine sovereignty establishes human existence and choice
- Divine sovereignty and human choice are compatible
- (1) God is sovereign but this does not mitigate human responsibility; and
- (2) Humans are morally responsible creatures but our actions do not make God contingent

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND CONTROL

- God prevents evil (Gen 20:6; 31:2)
- God permits evil (Jn 13:21-30; Acts 2:23)
- God directs evil (Gen 50:20)
- God limits evil (Job 1:12)

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND CONTROL

- “Embedded in these passages is the teaching that God is good. In his sovereignty, he stands asymmetrically behind good and evil. He stands behind good until the good is finally creditable to him. He stands behind evil in such a way, although it never escapes the boundaries of his sovereignty, the evil is always creditable only to secondary causalities” (Carson 2015)

DOCTRINE OF CONCORD

- “But we must remember that in all these passages it is very clear that Scripture nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil, but rather as bringing about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures” (Grudem, 322-23).
- The Doctrine of Concord states—the simultaneity of first cause and second causes. God achieves his will through the genuine free will of mankind.

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND SALVATION

- Total depravity requires election (Eph 2:1-2)
- Paul depicts the human race as separated from God (Rom 3:9-18). They are spiritually blind (Rom 1:18-23; 2 Cor 4:3-4). No one seeks God (Rom 3:9-11)
- Does it follow that no one could respond to the gospel without action by God?

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND SALVATION

- The term for “election” is *eklego*, which means to “pick out” or “choose” (Rom 8:33; 9:11; Eph 1:3-14)
- “Election concerns the plan or purpose of God, executed in eternity past, to save condemned sinners and restore them to fellowship with himself” (Demarest 1997, 97)

ELECTION OF ISRAEL

- God's initial purpose was to create a special people through Israel and the church
- God's call of Abram (Gen 12:1-3) as a channel of blessing to the nations (Gal 3:8)
- God elected and formed Israel (Deut 7:6-8) on the basis of his sovereignty and love (4:37a)
- There is a distinction between the election of ethnic Israel for conditional temporal privileges and the election of spiritual Israel for unconditional salvation (Rom 11:4)

TERMS DENOTING ELECTION

- Heb term *yada* refers “to know” or “regard with favor” (Gen 18:19)
- Terms such as *bachar* and *eklegomai* mean “to choose” or “to select”
- The term *proorizo* means “to predestine” (Rom 8:29)
- The term *proginosko* could mean “foresight” or “foreloving.” Based upon *yada* and *ginosko*, it likely refers to an intimate relationship (Rom 8:29; 1 Pt 1:1-2)

ELECTION IN EPH 1:3-14

- Source—God the Father (v. 3)
- Fact—we were chosen (v. 11; cf. 4-5, 9)
- Time—eternity past (v. 4)
- Object—we (v. 7) or us (vv. 3-6, 8-9)
- Sphere—in Christ (vv. 3-7, 9, 11)
- Motive—God's love (vv. 4-5)
- Impartiality—in accordance with his will (v. 5)
- Goal—be holy and blameless (v. 4)

CALVINISM

- Calvinists think that God chooses individuals to be saved based on nothing but his own free decision. Nothing a person has done or will do—not even faith—has any bearing on God’s choice
- As Augustine, in some ways a forerunner of Calvinism, puts it, “God does not choose us because we believe, but that we may believe” (*Predestination of the Saints*, 17.34)

DEPRAVITY

CALVINISM

- Man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is spiritually dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God. His will is not free; it is in bondage to his evil nature, and therefore cannot choose Christ or good until the Holy Spirit initiates the work of regeneration.

ARMINIANISM

- Man is not in a state of total spiritual helplessness. His will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. Each sinner possesses free will to cooperate with God's spirit to receive or to reject him. Faith is man's response that precedes regeneration and contributes to salvation.

ELECTION

CALVINISM

- God's choice of certain individuals to salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely on his sovereign will. His choice of particular individuals was not based on foreseen response on their part. God gives faith and repentance to those whom he selected.

ARMINIANISM

- God's choice of certain individuals was based on his foreseeing that they would respond to his call. Election was determined by or conditioned on what a person would do. God does not give faith, but humans possess free will to embrace or reject Christ.

ATONEMENT

CALVINISM

- Christ's redeeming work intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, therefore securing their salvation.

ARMINIANISM

- Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure salvation of anyone. His death did not actually put away anyone's sin. Redemption only becomes effective if a person chooses to accept it.

GRACE

CALVINISM

- The Holy Spirit extends a special call to the elect that inevitably brings them to salvation. The general or outward call is often rejected. But the special or internal witness of the Spirit cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion.

ARMINIANISM

- The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation. Due to free will, one can resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate a sinner until he believes. Human faith precedes and make the new birth possible.

PERSEVERANCE

CALVINISM

- All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of God and will persevere to the end.

ARMINIANISM

- Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith.

CONCLUSION

CALVINISM

- This system of theology was affirmed by the Synod of Dort in 1619 as the doctrine of salvation contained in Scripture.

ARMINIANISM

- This system of thought contained in the “Remonstrance” was submitted to the Reformed Church in Holland in 1610 for adoption. It was rejected by the Synod of Dort in 1619 as unscriptural.

DIVINE GRACE IN THE OT

- Verb *hanan* in the Qal: “to show favor” or “be gracious” (Ex 33:19b) for delivering his people from foreign exile (Isa 30:18-19), danger (Ps 4:1)
- Noun *Hesed* means “lovingkindness,” “favor” or “mercy,” especially in a covenantal sense (Ps 119:41)
- Grace is inherent in the term, *ahab* (“to love”)
- Grace is God loving, choosing, and entering into covenant with his people (Deut 4:37; Isa 43:4; Mal 1:2)

DIVINE GRACE IN THE NT

- Noun *charis* refers to “grace” or “favor”
- Verb *charizomai* means “to show favor” or “kindness” in forgiving (2 Cor 2:7; Eph 4:32)
- Noun *charisma* (gift) describes various grace-gifts of God, particularly, the gift of salvation (Rom 5:15-16)

COMMON GRACE

- Common grace refers to the undeserved favor of God expressed by his general care of creation and of all people without discrimination
- Ps 145:9—“The Lord is good to all. And his mercies are over all his works”
- Acts 14:17—God gave a witness to himself in his provision of seasons, rain, and food
- Acts 17:26-28—God created seasons and geography, so that man might “seek God” (v. 27), such that even pagan poets recognize it (v. 28)

PREVENIENT GRACE

- Most Christians agree that prevenient grace, in the general sense, refers to God's initial movement in salvation
- Arminians and Wesleyans insist that prevenient grace savingly engages all people, whereas Reformed people limits its efficacy to the elect
- Jn 1:9; 12:32; 16:8
- Titus 2:11

EFFECTUAL GRACE

- Older Reformed people use the phrase “irresistible grace” that no one can thwart God’s will but the Bible shows that some people can and do resist the Spirit (Acts 7:51; 26:14; Heb 12:25)
- Effectual grace refers to the life-transforming work of the Spirit in that he effectually brings people to himself
- Jer 24:7—“I will give them a heart to know me”
- Rom 6:18; 8:2—Special grace frees from the unregenerate from the bondage of sin
- Jn 6:37, 44—Draws sinners effectively to Christ
- Eph 2:4-5—Imparts spiritual life to the dead

CONCLUSIONS

- Evangelicals affirm that, because of the total depravity of man, God initiates salvation. For Arminians, they affirm prevenient grace, while Calvinists affirm effective grace
- Grace refers to God's act, gift, power, and method of saving us
- For Calvinists, regeneration precedes faith
- For Arminians, faith precedes regeneration

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you struggle with the belief that God is King? Why?
- How does God's sovereignty comfort you in the midst of pain and struggles?
- How does our commitment to God's sovereignty and grace provide us with confidence, and assurance?