

Transcript 196

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. The last several episodes we've been doing a series on Calvinism. We did what is Calvinism? Then we did separate episode in each of the five points. Then we did kind of a summary, sort of a what are the implications of Calvinism? So today we're actually going to be discussing what is Arminianism, which is the view most often put in contrast to Calvinism. So we'd invite you to go back and watch the other episodes, because that would really help you to discuss. And you may be asking, especially if you are an Armenian bent, like why does Calvinism get 5 and Arminianism only get one? One, because we believe Calvinism is closer to the truth than Arminianism. But two because in the Calvinism episodes we actually discuss each of the Armenian alternatives.

Shea Houdmann

Today we're going to be covering those a little bit more in depth. So just give you a background of where we're at in the series and why we are doing a specific one on Arminianism. What's I find most interesting is that I mean Calvinism is well known for the Tulip analogy. The the five points of total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the Saints. So some have felt pressure to come up with a flower analogy for Arminianism as well. And so there there are several attempts to it, some flower related, others not. Not sure why we only be so focused on flowers and these big theological conversations. But so for Arminianism, the most commonly known one is actually Daisy. So, Jeff, why don't you

break it down using kind of the Daisy analogy? Recognizing that not everyone is even familiar with this, like most all Calvinist know Tulip. But how is Daisy a a good way of summarizing Arminianism in contrast to Calvinism?

Jeff Laird

Well its good you bring that up, that it's not, it's not necessarily as well known. Almost anybody who identifies themselves as Calvinist or reformed will have some knowledge of Tulip or the doctrines of grace. There's a lot of people who likely are would not identify as Armenians who hold to some sort of Armenian theology. I suppose if they did, they may know the Daisy, but it's not always the most popular. But it is convenient, partly because the Daisy D-a-i-s-y follows along directly in the same order as the T-u-l-i-p, of tulip. So that makes it sort of handy for comparison purposes at least. But yes, some Armenians would not necessarily agree with all of it.

Jeff Laird

The first one in that the D is diminished depravity. And that's the contrast to total depravity. And the basic idea of that is that in Arminianism mankind is sinful. We are fallen. We are depraved, but not so depraved, not so fallen that we are incapable of listening to or responding to the Holy Spirit. The A is the contrast to the U. The unconditional election in Arminianism that would be abrogated election, or what's sometimes called the all-encompassing call or conditional election. To some extent this is the one that really becomes the controversy, because this is the idea that God elects, but his election is based on his foreknowledge of which people will or will not except faith. So in the Armenian sense, God's election is there. Predestination not as much. The next one is I in personal atonement. That's versus limited atonement. That's the idea that God's infinite love or general atonement is enough sacrifice for everybody. It's just not applied, except to those who actually choose to believe. The S in Daisy is sedentary grace. That's the idea that there is what they may call spontaneous grace or resistible grace. The counter to irresistible grace in Tulip. The idea is that man has to be regenerated to a certain extent before he can

accept faith. But he can resist. So the Holy Spirit does not force a change of mind. The Holy Spirit regenerates a person to the point where they can make a free will decision, and then that person is free to say yes or no. And then the last part of Daisy is the why that's yieldable justification. That's in contrast to perseverance of the Saints. Yieldable justification would be conditional security. This is the idea that saving faith can be lost, that you maintain your salvation insofar as you hold on. For some Armenians, that believes that apostasy leaving the faith is an unforgivable sin. That once you leave, that's it. And you cannot come back. Others believe that you can sort of go through cycles of being in or out. And this is almost certainly the one that, just like with the last point of Calvinism, is the most frequently disagreed with. There are quite a few Armenians who would disagree with the idea of yieldable justification. They would hold to what we would call once saved, always saved. So that's the basic idea. Any of those can be oversimplified. Anybody can misunderstand these things just because of the way they work. There's going to be people who will disagree a little bit about what the specifics mean, but if you want to summarize Arminianism quickly, the D-a-i-s-y, Daisy is one of the easiest ways to do it.

Shea Houdmann

And Jeff, I agree with you 100%. In my experience with Arminianism, similar to Calvinism, and that you can there are four point Calvinists, 3 point Calvinist, 2 point, 1 point. Whatever. I find there's even more variance with Arminianism in terms of people I know a lot of Armenians who like you said, firmly believe in eternal security. And so at that point, they don't even be 4 point Armenians. And actually classical, original Arminianism named after Jacobus Arminius his view on total depravity was virtually indistinguishable from that of Calvin. So even I don't know if the original Armenian and what actually held all five of these points. So yeah, just like in Calvinism, there's a lot of variance in terms of which points you believe and just kind of in the Calvinism series like some Armenians are like, take it or leave it as a whole package. And there's like, no. You can mix and choose. You can be a two point Calvinist mix

with the three-point Armenian and all this stuff. So this is Jeff just described the points. Just want you to know that just as with Calvinism, to varying degrees, each of these points have biblical support. And so Kevin's going to jump into now. This is a brief discussion on where is some biblical support for some of the points of Arminianism and maybe even a little bit more of why are some of the points of Arminianism not biblical in our opinion. So Kevin, won't you take it from here?

Kevin Stone

Some of the biblical support that Armenians will point to and say, well, this this supports our our position right here include the following. We have John 3, verse 36, he who believes in the Son has everlasting life. And he who does not believe the Son shall not see life. The wrath of God abides on him. So this is pointed to as proof of the free will of mankind. You know it's our salvation depends on belief. And the he who believes is going to have eternal life. And the person who doesn't believe is not going to see that life. And so it looks like our salvations conditioned upon our choosing God.

Kevin Stone

Romans 8, verse 29, for whom he foreknew he also predestined. And so the Armenian would look at that verse and say well see election is based on the foreknowledge of God. God looked into the future and he saw who would choose him and so that God, then in turn chose that person. That person is one of the elect because of God's knowledge, his foreknowledge, that that person would eventually choose him. So this would be going along with conditional election that God elects individuals based on his foreknowledge of who would ultimately be believing in Him.

Kevin Stone

First, John two and verse two. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And so this would support unlimited atonement. And we talked about this when we we talked about the L of Tulip, the limited atonement. And that's that's

probably the one point of Calvinism I personally have the most problem with because of in large part because of this verse, First John two verse 2 which seems to very directly say that Christ was a propitiation. That is the satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

Kevin Stone

First Thessalonians 5 and verse 19 is another proof text used by the Armenian camp. Do not quench the spirit. And then another verse that we talked about in a previous podcast, Luke 7 and verse 30. The Pharisees and the experts of the law rejected God's purpose for themselves because they had not been baptized by John. So God's purpose was that they do repent, which would be shown in the baptism of John. But they refused that. They refuse God's will for them, they refuse God's purpose for them. And so that passage, along with you know, the command to not quench the holy spirit, the Armenian position says well see this says that grace is resistible, that we can indeed say no to the Holy Spirit, and God gives us that freedom to resist him, to to oppose his will and not have it be active, activated in our lives.

Kevin Stone

And then Galatians five and verse 4 you have become estranged from Christ. You who attempt to be justified by the law. You have fallen from grace Paul says here. So the Armenian position, at least some some Armenians, not all of them, teach that you can lose your salvation. And so this would be a passage that they would point to saying the fall from grace here is Paul's way of saying that, you know, they have lost their salvation. And so this is of course we would look at this passage differently, but the Armenian interpretation would be that salvation might be given up, salvation might be lost, you can fall away from that. I do not consider myself to be an Armenian. I'm more of an emeraldian, a four point Calvinist is how I would classify myself. But there have been a lot of of men that I respect who have been in the Armenian camp, John and Charles Wesley, of course, were holders of Armenian theology. I and I love what they have done. Also AW Tozer, a guy that I love, I I have read a whole lot of Tozer and and his work has just been a blessing to me in so many different ways. I love Tozer but he would have fallen into

the Armenian side of things as well. Andrew Murray, who wrote a lot about prayer. RA Tory, another very good theologian and writer. David Wilkerson, the cross and the switchblade guy, and I've read several of his books and I appreciate all that God did through him. John R Rice, I've read several of his commentaries and he's another one who would be classified as an Armenian and yet a real blessing to me.

Shea Houdmann

I think Kevin, I appreciate you going through the different Godly men and teachers who hold to an Armenian perspective. So I think that's a really important reminder that even though that we think Calvinism is closer to the truth than Arminianism, in no sense do we believe that Armenians are heretics or the Armenians are not our brothers and sisters in Christ. With the the eternal security point, that's the hardest one for me because it's really hard for me to see how you can deny eternal security and not somehow believe in some form of work salvation. That that we have to maintain our salvation. We have to keep ourselves saved. And that comes awfully close to earning our salvation. But I know Armenians who don't believe in eternal security, who firmly and absolutely believe that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. So I don't think any of the points of Arminianism are necessarily heresy. And I do believe like just Kevin as you went through. There are biblical passages that, especially on unlimited atonement, that do seem to support the Armenian perspective. So do we consider ourselves Armenian? No, we do not. Do we consider Armenians and heresy also? No, we do not. We just. It's not this whole series we've even, even on the points of Calvinism, we're like there's some that we agree with more, more so than others. Others that we reject outright and with the limited atonement example. So it's hear us trying to, yes, these these issues are important. They're fascinating. They're fun to study. They can even be in the right circumstance a fun debate to have. But just know, dividing over this, fighting over this, declaring Calvinists, declaring Armenians unsaved, Armenians declaring Calvin is unsaved. That's not our heart. Not our spirit, not our attitude here at Got Questions at all.

Jeff Laird

So the basic idea that we're getting into with all of these is that there are differences of opinion both inside and outside of these different perspectives. So you can have people who sincerely, honestly, with good faith, take the Bible seriously and they come up with different interpretations. And even within those different ideas, just as there is within Calvinism, Armenians may have different ideas about what the specific versions of this mean or don't mean. For me, one of the things that's important to be careful of is just like with Calvinism, we have to know what some of these different ideas imply. There's some aspects of Calvinism that I look at, and I say if I take this exactly the way it's understood, I don't, I don't know if I agree theologically with some of the implications. With Arminianism, at least for me, some of those are a little bit more serious. The the overall one, just like with Calvinism, we talked about the idea that the main gist of it is the idea of God's sovereignty, that God is completely and totally 100% in control.

Jeff Laird

Flip side of that is going to be the Armenian view, which is essentially that when it comes to salvation, people are 100% in control. That doesn't mean that Armenians don't believe that God is sovereign. They don't. It's not that they believe that God has no control or no power, but the Armenian view suggests that God entirely places that decision in the hands of human beings. That he only calls people, only provides such that they have a choice. They have a chance. But he does not actually make that happen. So in the construct that we just talked about in the traditional Daisy sense, God's election is based on his foreknowledge. And that's a really important distinction to make because there are other ways to look at the relationship between free will and God's sovereignty. But this one for Arminianism really says that God looks ahead and then he elects based on what he is seeing. The choice is still that if persons. For me, that gets a little theologically awkward, because now you know then, what does election really mean in that sense, you know, if God is just secondary to what's happening? I know there's going to

be people who will have a different take on what that means and what it doesn't mean. But that's a little bit of the way that goes together.

Jeff Laird

There are different implications of what the Armenian ideas mean, the idea of yieldable justification or that you can lose your salvation. Just like you were saying, Shea, that very strongly leads towards a works based sort of idea. If it's possible for me to physically do something, think something to lose my salvation, then why am I saying that it's based on grace? If I have to do something to keep it or maintain it. So different ways to look at this. Different, even different acronyms that people use for Arminianism. Some of the ideas are more biblical than others. Some of them are a little bit riskier, and the important thing is to know what the implications are for the different ones, understand where they go, where they lead and where they don't lead.

Shea Houdmann

Jeff, that's a great point. When you take any of these theological systems to their extreme, can result in all sorts of problems. I guess we probably do need to talk about double predestination and hyper Calvinism on that side. Maybe we'll save that for another episode. But Kevin, I know in your study of Arminianism you came up with some some of the extreme views that definitely not all Armenians hold this, but if you take Arminianism to a extreme viewpoint, what are some of the problems that can result theologically speaking?

Kevin Stone

Yeah, and I'm glad that you framed it that way that if you take Arminianism to extremes, extremes that were are not intended, then you can end up with some false doctrines. And I want to be careful here. Careful to explain that what these false teachings are are not taught by Armenians, but they are, there is an association there. I mean sometimes the Armenian theology can come close to some of these other doctrines. And so one, for example would be semi plagiarism. And uh semi Pelagianism is the idea that it really emphasizes free will. So we

have the free will, not necessarily to choose good and evil, but we do have the free will to choose Christ. And there's there's nothing in our in our nature that would prohibit us from taking that first step toward God and choosing faith, choosing Christ. Now the Armenian position says that God has to make that first move through prevenient grace, and so God gives us the grace to free our will, and then we can freely choose to accept Christ. Prevenient Grace does not require us to accept Christ, but it enables us to. Well, the semi pelagian position kind of dispenses with the prevenient grace. You don't need that, you can choose Christ on your own, on your own power. You you have that ability. So again, semi pelagianism is not Arminianism, but in in some ways it comes very close in that it emphasizes the free will of man to a great extent. I should probably throw in here too that a lot of times we see the the conflict here between Calvinism and Arminianism as being between God's sovereignty being emphasized on on one hand and man's free will being emphasized on the other hand.

Kevin Stone

But most Armenians would say that the the crux of the matter is really God's goodness at the focus of Arminianism is the goodness of God, the character of God, the love of God. Because he loves, He gives us a choice. Because He is good, He gives us the prevenient grace we need to be able to freely make that choice. So little distinction there that I think that our Armenian friends would appreciate that they want to emphasize God's goodness.

Kevin Stone

But another another false teaching that has sometimes associated with Arminianism is open theism. This is the idea that God does not know the future when it comes to the choices that we're going to make. So again, it emphasizes man's free will. That God gives us totally free will, and he lets us decide, and then he responds accordingly. So, when, as he looks into the future, he does not look at, he cannot even see maybe what choices we're going to make. And so he waits for us to make those choices, and then he responds, opens theism. See a lot of open theists would consider themselves to be Armenian. Most Armenians would do want, want to

disassociate themselves though from open theism as a theology. And so there's there's kind of a disconnect there.

Kevin Stone

And then also the doctrine of sinless perfection. Now there are Armenians who teach this, that it is possible to actually completely defeat sin in our lives to such an extent that we are no, we are no longer sinners. We have reached that state of of sinless perfection here and now in this world. Now I want to be careful to say that this goes beyond what Arminius actually taught, but there are some Armenians today who who would hold to this. Not all of them, but some of them do hold to some version of sinless perfection. And so those three, those three false teachings are sometimes related to our Arminianism, when it is taken to a a little bit too far, in my opinion. But then there's the idea that you can lose your salvation, that a lot of Armenians hold to. And that for me is a a deal breaker in and of itself.

Jeff Laird

There there is a big difference between the things that are clear, the things that are not. And it's good that you mention the idea that some things sort of become a caricature, you know? The the Calvinist caricature of Arminianism is God is just sitting there twiddling his thumbs, not really involved, and just letting people do whatever. And he's he's handing over everything to them. Whereas the Armenian caricature of Calvinism is that God is this uncaring robot who's just programming us like, you know, plinko chips or, you know, machines to just do whatever we want. Neither one of those is really true. That's not the way that either an Armenian or a Calvinist perceives their concept of what these doctrines of grace mean. That does not mean that you cannot get into theological problems, when, like you said, Kevin, you take some of these ideas and you run with them by assuming that they're just fundamental truths rather than just human attempts to understand what's behind there. So we talked about those with Calvinism that you can get a runaway version of that where it leads to Hyper Calvinism, where the idea is, OK, God's totally sovereign, and man has no choice. So why evangelize? Then

you've got the Armenian side that says, God gives us all the free choice. That means I have to keep my salvation and he's just gonna let me do what I'm going to do. Either one of those you gotta be careful with because it's it's very easy to turn these things into cartoons. It's sometimes been said that Calvin would not have been a Calvinist, and Armenians would not have been an Armenian because the to some extent those versions and those ideas of faith have changed. They've morphed a little over time. So again the tribalism is not what's important. It's not that we identify a certain way and then defend from there. It's that we understand and then assess individually as we go forward.

Shea Houdmann

Jeff, I like how you described him as caricatures because like the most common caricature I hear from Calvin is about Armenians is that essentially, they don't want to believe that God's in control. That they want to believe that they are personally in control. That the whole no one can tell me what to do. No one can. I made the decision to receive Christ. I did this. I did this. And so when Kevin mentioned open theism, I'm thinking, yeah, that's that definitely makes sense because if God knows the future, then in the sense the future is set. And then therefore that takes away my choice. So you can see how it flows from the point of questioning the Bible presents that God elects, but also we must also individually by grace through faith receive Christ. So there has to be some sort of choice. But if God actually knows the future, is that taking away my choices? Therefore, God can't know the future, which is what we'd say is heresy, because the Bible give you so many countless examples of God, both knowing the future, but God also controlling, setting, determining the future. So taking to a logical extreme, the view of no there has to be some sort of human responsibility, free will in this conversation. Taking that to logical stream is that God can't know the future, but that would take away my free will. So you can kind of see how both the caricature, but the caricature even presents a problem that is a reality, and many Armenians that can, for some, lead them to a a logical extreme. So seeing these points intertwine, seeing how they relate to one another really

helps to think through the issues, and both what does the Bible teach? And then also what are the implications of both belief systems? And even maybe to an extent, what is the heart behind them, because I think that determines a lot of both what we believe and how we react to the opposite side.

Jeff Laird

The thing that you see most often, I think that that demonstrates where controversy comes up, and it's not necessarily handled the best way, is in the the way that those two perspectives and as we said before, there are others. There are other ways to look at this than just Calvinism and Arminianism. But when those two especially come together frequently, what you see happening is you have some things that Scripture says that talk about free will and the Armenian side looks at those and says that means exactly what it means as simply as it's stated in the most clear sense when you first read it. And then everything that talks about predestination, election, God's sovereignty, God's choice, all those things, those things all have to be taken in either some sort of a metaphorical sense, or they have to be sort of moved around or wrapped around. And right now all the Calvinists are going, yes, that's right.

Jeff Laird

Well, it's exactly the same thing the other way. There are times where in this discussion, the Calvinists will read verses that talk about God's sovereignty and his election and his predestination and say that is true in the simplest literalist, most direct form. But then every time that it talks about people resisting or choosing or being held responsible, those all have to be taken as metaphor or moved around and twisted around. So it's worth at least recognizing when we have a perspective on things where are we handling Scripture and how are we handling Scripture in that sense? That's not to say that you have to be all literal or all metaphorical, or one way or the other. It's just to note that neither one of these two sides in this particular debate can claim that they're perfectly objective. There isn't anybody who's perfectly objective on that. So it's it's not just a question of saying which of these systems on the whole do we think is more

biblical? It's more a question of looking at these individual questions. Where do we think the Bible comes down and then how does your typical Calvinist, typical Armenian typical, whatever have to say about that?

Shea Houdmann

Hopefully, especially if you've watched or listened to the other episodes in this series, you've heard us say that the point of gotquestions.org is not to promote Calvinism or Armenianism for that that example. Our our goal is to here's what the Bible teaches. Going through the series, here's the five points of Calvinism. Today we're discussing Armenianism. Both just to give you the idea of different ways, Christians throughout history and even today are still discussing trying to understand these issues. Ultimately, that's what we want you to do. We want you to search the scriptures, go to God's word, study the different references that we brought up throughout this whole series and ask God for wisdom and come to what you believe to be the the biblical viewpoint.

Shea Houdmann

With that said, we are not ashamed to say that we believe that Calvinism is closer to the truth than Arminianism, but at the same time, we do not consider Arminianism heresies. We have more problems with some of the points of Arminianism than others. But ultimately this is an issue that we believe that God is fully sovereign, we believe that he predestined, he elects. We believe that human beings us, we are genuinely, legitimately responsible for exercising our will to trust in Christ. How that all works, how those two truths were to work together? That's that's the rub. That's where ultimately this debate comes down to. And as much as we enjoy discussing this, I've answered literally thousands of questions over the years on these issues. Ultimately the answer does not change our responsibility, which is to be active in sharing the gospel. Whether you believe in Calvinism or Arminianism, our job is to make disciples through proclaiming the gospel, teaching God's word, and then trusting that God is behind the scenes producing the results, producing the changes that he desires. That God is the one drawing

people to salvation, and yet somehow that drawing results in the people actually believing in the gospel, trusting in Jesus Christ by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And both Calvinists and Armenians believe that, that the other side has trouble understanding how the other side can believe that based on their beliefs.

Shea Houdmann

So I hope our conversations throughout these episodes have been helpful to you. Hope today it's this conversation of what is Arminianism is and how does it relate to Calvinism has also been helpful. We're doing one more just kind of discussing some of the other alternatives that are to Calvinism and Arminianism. And maybe trying to tie this whole series up in a nice little bow, which I doubt will actually happen, but we'll give it our best shot. So Jeff, Kevin, thank you for joining me today. This has been the episode on what is Arminianism? Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.